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ABSTRACT

The nine articles in this guide discuss the problems involved in teaching writing and offer suggestions for improving writing instruction. The first article presents responses given by educators to a nationwide survey concerning the causes of writing problems, concluding that until recently the biggest problems were untrained teachers and a lack of research. The second article contains answers given by Donald Graves and Donald Murray to questions about teaching writing and about how administrators can improve writing programs in their schools. The third article explains a technique by which students learn "real world" writing, and offers a detailed report on standards for writing programs developed by the National Council of Teachers of English, and the fourth lists 13 ingredients for successful writing programs that emerged from interviews with writing experts, administrators, and teachers. The fifth and sixth articles provide suggestions for writing instruction in elementary and secondary schools, respectively, while the seventh article gives descriptions of the best known writing programs in the United States. The eighth article discusses the principal's role in the writing program, and the final one explains different types of writing evaluation. (FL)

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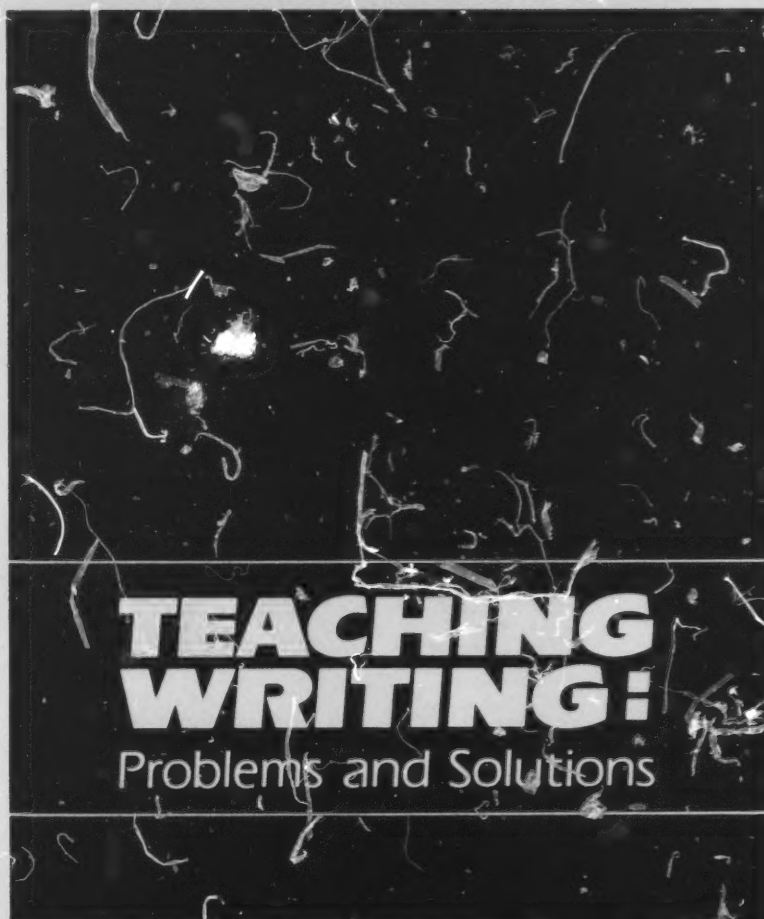
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AASA Critical Issues Report



American Association of School Administrators

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by Shirley Boes Neill
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The AASA Critical Issues Series

Many of the critical issues facing schools today are controversial. Seldom is there one best answer in dealing with these issues. What is best in one community may not be best in another. That is why the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) decided to produce a series of Critical Issues Reports. These in-depth reports provide a wealth of information and ideas to help school administrators and school boards deal effectively with the challenge of assuring high quality education for students.

Teaching Writing: Problems and Solutions is the eleventh in the AASA Critical Issues Series. Like the others, it provides an analysis of this perennial problem and presents "how to" suggestions from experts and from school systems that have effectively dealt with the issue. Many of the ideas included in this book were shared with AASA through a nationwide survey of educational leaders. It is our hope that the information included in this publication will help schools learn from the successes and failures of others. We have purposely prepared this publication in non-jargon English.

Our thanks to those who helped make this publication a reality . . . authorities in the field of writing, directors of writing programs, school administrators, and teachers.

The manuscript was written by Shirley Boes Neill, an education writer based in Carmichael, Calif., and editor of Education News Service, Sacramento, Calif.

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This report was reviewed by AASA and approved for publication. Approval does not signify that the contents reflect the views or policies of AASA.

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Diversity Complexity
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Introduction

Writing, some say, is the most neglected of the big three basic skills. The reasons?

- Writing is, in the view of many experts, "the hardest thing we ask students to do in school."
- Research into the teaching of writing is still in its infancy.
- Not enough elementary and secondary teachers, including English teachers, received adequate preparation in college for teaching writing.

The problem is not new. Although many critics, starting with a December 1975 issue of *Newsweek*, proclaimed "the writing crisis" a failure of modern schools, the experts reject this notion. "I don't think we ever had a time when very many people were taught to write well," said Prof. Donald Murray of the University of New Hampshire in an interview for this report. "In the good old days, writing wasn't taught, and it wasn't learned."

Evidence of the long history of student writing problems comes from a prestigious institution — the University of California. It serves the top 12 percent of students in the state. Yet, back in 1898, university officials decided they had to do something to remediate the writing deficiencies of incoming freshmen. The result was Subject A, a new remedial writing course that became known to thousands of students as "bonehead English."

Peak enrollment in Subject A at the Berkeley campus occurred in 1936 when 48 percent of new students couldn't write well enough, in the university's judgment, to survive in college. Subject A became as much a part of university life as the fog from San Francisco Bay rolling in over the campus.

Thirty-seven years later, a major effort was launched by the university to reduce the number of incoming freshmen who were required to take the remedial course. In 1973, with 41 percent of the freshmen enrolled in Subject A, Prof. James Gray, along with several others, started the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP). It was a modest effort to help English teachers in the university's feeder schools improve the way they taught writing. By

reaching classroom teachers, the university hoped to reach students.

Why wasn't this done sooner? Apparently, no one thought of it. Everyone assumed that teachers knew how to teach writing. Gray said flatly: "Most teachers in the schools were not prepared to teach writing, no matter what grade levels they taught." Another reason: Time, money, and attention were focused on the teaching of reading — so much so that authorities say research into the teaching of writing is 50 to 100 years behind research in reading. No one questioned how writing was taught in schools until the late 1960s.

In the early 1970s, researchers discovered that writers in the real world follow a *process* when they write, but teachers did not know about it. Teachers were assigning writing, but they were not teaching students how to write. Schools were concentrating on teaching students about the tools of the craft of writing — grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation — but not the craft itself.

Why Teach Writing?

One might ask: Why teach students this process when most of them are not going to become professional writers?

Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire answered that question in *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*. Writing, Graves said, is important for these reasons:

- As a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents. . . . Writing is a highly complex act that demands the analysis and synthesis of many levels of thinking.
- Writing develops initiative. In reading, everything is provided. In writing, the learner must supply everything: the right relationship between sounds and letters, the order of the letters and their form on the page, the topic, information, questions, answers, order.
- Writing develops courage. At no point is the learner more vulnerable than in writing.

- Writing, more than any other subject, can lead to personal breakthroughs in learning.
- Writing can contribute to reading from the first day of school. Writing, some say, is active, whereas reading is passive.
- Writing contributes strongly to reading comprehension as children grow older. The ability to revise writing for greater power and economy is one of the higher forms of reading.

Others answer the question "why teach writing?" by considering the economic impact of poor writing. "The reasons given by some corporations for leaving urban environments," said James D. Koerner, editor of *The Teaching of Expository Writing*, "is that they couldn't find people for clerical jobs who bring minimal competence in basic skills." In the same report, Norman Macrae, deputy editor of the London-based publication, *The Economist*, noted: "Retailing of information is the most important task in America today and is the most inefficiently performed. . . . The data-processing revolution itself is being held up mainly by linguistic restraints. A computer can be told what to do only by somebody who expresses to somebody else exactly what he wants."

Current Status

Change is taking place slowly. Numerous school administrators interviewed for this report said new minimum competency requirements in writing in their states have provided the impetus for examining how well students write and for involving teachers in inservice training. "For the first time, we have English teachers, who formerly would speak only of literature in their classes, teaching and requiring kids to write," said one administrator.

The changes taking place can be traced not only to minimum competency requirements but also to the ferment caused by BAWP and other teacher inservice training efforts around the country.

Thirteen case studies in this book demonstrate that schools can develop effective writing programs. One of the case studies, for example, describes the Vermont Writing Program. It enabled six elementary schools to develop model writing programs which are open for visitation.

The first breakthroughs in writing have been made, in the opinion of many authorities interviewed for this report. But they do not underestimate the difficulties ahead:

- More research is needed, and inservice training needs are still great.
- School administrators generally are reluctant

"To master the complex of intellectual processes required for writing is to learn a discipline that permanently changes the learner in ways that can only be described as making him smarter."

—Sheridan Blau
Director, South Coast Writing Project
University of California, Santa Barbara

to attend inservice sessions on writing. They must have basic knowledge of the process, authorities stress, to evaluate and improve writing programs in their districts.

- Not enough information is available on how to teach writing to learning disabled students, those for whom English is a second language, or those who need remedial instruction.
- Writing must be viewed as a learning skill all students should use in all subjects, not as a separate subject. But, noted an assistant superintendent from Minnesota, "many secondary teachers look upon writing the same as they do reading: it is not their responsibility. Elementary teachers are willing to teach writing," he said. "The problem is to convince the secondary staff of their duty."
- Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Scholastic Aptitude Test suggest that students often have difficulty applying basic skills to more advanced tasks. School districts must assure that students have an opportunity to develop writing skills beyond minimum competency levels.

Writing authorities balance these problems with optimism. "The awakening regarding writing has come," noted Cecelia Kingston, a former English teacher in Tarrytown, N.Y., who now works as a consultant to school districts in writing. "Never in all of my years in education have I seen as many people trying to improve their teaching."

Donald Graves added: "I keep thinking this movement will go bust — American curriculum movements being what they are. But it's not. Teachers are getting so much personal satisfaction that they don't want to give it up. And in writing, kids find themselves. That is something teachers have not seen for a long time. They are not going to let go of it."

Grammar Descriptive
Structure Narrative
Spelling Writing Style
Syntax Interpretive
Description Editorials
Analytical Rhetorical
Perception Cognitive

The Problem: How Big; Why?

Student writing is a serious problem in most of the nation's school districts. And what is even worse, many districts don't know it's a problem. To illustrate: Forty percent of the respondents to a survey for this report said student writing is a "serious" problem in their schools. Fifty percent judged it to be a "minor" problem. In many of these districts, however, student writing has not been formally evaluated and teachers have received virtually no training in the teaching of writing. Untrained teachers ensures a weak writing program, at best.

Concrete evidence of the need for change comes from surveys of the amount of writing students actually do. These surveys show that the only writing required of students in many schools is filling in the blanks, doing grammar exercises, or answering multiple-choice questions. In interviews for this report, moreover, consultants to school districts noted the difficulty they have in trying to help some districts improve their writing programs. Why? "There's no program," said one consultant. "The teachers are not teaching writing, and the students are not required to write."

Additional evidence comes from scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), other tests and assessments at the national, state, and district level; and the testimony of school administrators, state officials, teachers, and writing experts.

Many districts in states with minimum competency requirements in writing have found, for example, that one-half or more of their students cannot meet the minimum standards. Consequently, these districts have been forced to add remedial courses. At the postsecondary level, the situation is the same. Increasing numbers of colleges and universities must provide remedial writing courses for up to one-half of incoming students.

Many reasons are given for student writing prob-

lems. Foremost among these, in the view of many experts, are the following:

- Very few of all elementary and secondary teachers now teaching have received any preservice preparation in the teaching of writing. Opportunities for inservice training, however, have been emerging for at least a limited number of teachers during the past decade.
- Little research into the teaching of writing seems to have been done prior to the 1960s. Until recently, very little of that research has been made directly available to teachers.
- Schools and society have given low priority to the ability to communicate clearly in writing.

Critical Issues Survey

A survey conducted for this **Critical Issues Report** asked approximately 1,600 AASA members: "At the present time, is the problem of student writing in your district *serious*, *minor*, or *no problem at all*?"

Here is how the 425 respondents to the survey answered that question:

- 40% — Serious
- 3% — Moderate or typical*
- 50% — Minor
- 5% — No problem at all
- 2% — No response

*Write-in responses

In answer to another question in the survey, 92 percent of the respondents said their districts were putting more emphasis on writing than they had three years earlier. Seven percent said they had not increased their emphasis on writing, and 1 percent did not answer.

Respondents were asked to indicate on a checklist what form the renewed emphasis was taking.

A majority of the respondents said students in their districts were spending more time working on

writing. Only 43 percent, however, said they provided some type of inservice training for teachers.

Following is a complete tally of the responses to the survey question:

- 57% — Elementary students are spending more time on writing.
- 56% — Secondary students are spending more time on writing.
- 43% — We provide inservice training for teachers in the teaching of writing.
- 41% — We require that all teachers stress writing in their classes. (Note: Some respondents changed "require" to "encourage," "recommend," or "request" in this statement.)
- 38% — More frequent testing of students' writing skills.
- 15% — The number of required courses in writing in grades 9-12 has been increased.
- 15% — The number of elective courses in writing in grades 9-12 has been increased.
- 13% — We have developed guidelines or a handbook on writing.

SAT Results

The current national concern about the status of student writing began in 1973 when the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) sparked media interest in student performance with its disclosure of a long, continuing decline in the verbal and mathematic scores of students taking the SAT.

Various media carried in-depth stories about the declining scores, and many state legislatures and citizens vigorously insisted that elementary and secondary schools join the "back to basics" movement and institute minimum competency requirements for all students.

Decline bottoms out. In 1980, after 12 years of decline, the scores of college-bound students on the verbal section of the SAT hit a low of 424 (out of a possible 800). The average score remained the same in 1981. In 1963, the average score was 478.

Continuing slide on another CEEB test. On the Test of Standard Written English, the average score for men and women declined from 43.2 in 1975 to 42.4 in 1981 (or the equivalent of a 10-point difference on the usual CEEB scale of 200 to 800). The declines occurred, CEEB noted, "even though there has been a well publicized concern for the writing skills of entering college students."

The test is used to evaluate students' ability to recognize standard written English, the language of most college textbooks and the one students are expected to use in college work.

NAEP Results

The results of three writing assessments conducted in 1970, 1974, and 1979 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also indicate trends in student writing skills. A federally funded project administered by the Education Commission of the States, NAEP measures the nation's educational progress by determining the skills, knowledge, and attitudes possessed by youth at ages 9, 13, and 17.

The assessments require samplings of students from all parts of the country to answer survey and multiple-choice questions and to complete essays.

The first NAEP assessment of student writing serves as a "baseline" for the two later assessments.

The second assessment, conducted in 1974, made headlines nationwide because it revealed significant declines in the writing skills of 13- and 17-year-olds.

Nationwide publicity of the 1974 results, along with the decline in SAT scores, helped to set off a national movement to halt what some people called "the writing crisis."

Ten-year trends. NAEP summarized the changes in student writing indicated in its three assessments in *Writing Achievement, 1969-79*. Here are the results:

Group: 9-year-olds

Findings:

- Some indications of improvement in overall "quality" of their writing.

- Student performance on three exercises to measure rhetorical skills (effectiveness of writing) disclosed that: the percentage of students writing competent papers on one exercise slipped from 17 percent in 1970 to 10 percent in 1979; only 14 percent of the group wrote a competent paper on a second exercise; fewer than 16 percent of students wrote a competent paper on a third exercise.

- In 1979, only about one-half of the students wrote a successful letter to order a calendar through the mail.

Group: 13-year-olds

Findings:

- Descriptive writing declined significantly, with most of the decline taking place between the first two assessments.

- The percentage of students writing a competent paper on one exercise slipped from 10 percent in 1969 to 6 percent in 1979; fewer than 20 percent of the students wrote a competent paper on a second exercise; and, on a third exercise requiring students to write a letter to their principal, 28 percent received a competent rating in 1974 compared to 20 percent in 1979. Eighty percent of the students

wrote a successful letter to a mail order firm.

- The percent of papers displaying good cohesion was low (29 percent) in 1969, much lower (19 percent) in 1974, and about the same (21 percent) in 1979.

- The slight increase in fragments and run-on sentences and the large proportion of awkward sentences in the 1979 assessment were, according to NAEP, "some cause for concern."

Group: 17-year-olds

Findings:

- Student performance on four different exercises to measure rhetorical skills in the 1979 assessment revealed that 75 percent of the group wrote competent narratives on one exercise, up from 65 percent in 1969; 16 percent wrote a competent paper on a humorous narrative exercise, down from 18 percent in 1974; 15 percent wrote a competent paper on a third exercise, down from 21 percent in 1974; 47 percent wrote a competent paper on the fourth exercise, about the same as in 1974.

- The percent of papers displaying good cohesion on one exercise rose from 80 percent to 86 percent between 1969 and 1979.

- Proportions of mechanical errors in the papers changed little over the decade. Punctuation problems, misspellings, and awkward sentences continued to plague the majority of students.

Conclusion: From 10 to 25 percent, and sometimes 30 percent of youngsters at each age, NAEP concluded, have "extremely serious" problems with writing. These proportions, said a group of five educators brought together by NAEP to review the 1979 results, are "unacceptably high."

Note: The three-volume report, *Writing Achievement, 1969-79*, is available from NAEP, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, Colo. 80295. Write to NAEP for titles and prices.

Additional findings from NAEP. In 1981, NAEP released an analysis of students' ability to write short essays about literary selections.

How did the students do? Not very well. The explanations were superficial, they contained few references to the materials that students had been asked to read, and they did not include comparisons with other literary works, according to the three experts NAEP asked to review student responses.

The experts recommended that students be given more opportunities for discussion of ideas and practice in writing, that tests include essay questions, that writing be incorporated into all areas of the curriculum, and that teachers be trained to teach writing, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Note: The findings are contained in *Reading,*

Thinking, and Writing: Results from the 1979-80 Assessment of Reading and Literature (available from NAEP; \$9.80).

Anecdotal Information

One long-time teacher described student writing as one of those unsettled and unsettling education issues that doesn't get solved, yet doesn't go away. Consequently, every decade or two, student writing is declared "a crisis" or "in critical condition," she said.

Some other educators believe there is more cause for concern now than in years past. They make statements such as the following:

"I can remember no time when the state of student writing has not been cause for dismay, but the dismay is deeper now and more widespread, and the evidences which give rise to that dismay more compelling." — Dante Peter Ciochetto, a teacher with more than 30 years in the classroom, quoted in *The Teaching of Expository Writing* (Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 630 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10020; 1977).

"In 1964, when I started to teach, many students wrote incoherent sentences. Fifteen years later, in my last year of high school teaching, the problem I saw was not incoherence, but blandness. The writing produced by many students was just not interesting." — A former teacher of English in a large urban high school who now works as a consultant in a writing project.

"UCLA's enrollment represents the upper one-eighth of California students, and yet only half of them are able to read and write with sophistication." — William D. Schaefer, executive vice chancellor of UCLA, speaking before the Western Regional Conference of the College Board in February 1981.

"Most student writing that is classified as good wouldn't be read by anyone other than an instructor who is paid to do it." — Peter Elbow, author and teacher, quoted in *Moving Between Practice and Research in Writing*, published by the National Institute of Education.

State Tests

School districts and states use various means to determine how much students know about writing skills (e.g., mechanics or conventions of writing) and how well they write.

Following are results from two different types of tests in two states: a statewide assessment program used in California and a minimum competency test used in Texas.

What Teachers Say

Teachers, like their critics, can recite a litany of problems that prevent effective teaching of writing. Here is a sampling of the obstacles, in the view of secondary teachers who were interviewed for this report:

- **Paperwork.** Many English teachers feel they are the workhorses of the school system. Even those teachers who use various alternatives for dealing with the volumes of paperwork generated in composition classes can be expected to ask for additional considerations (e.g., extra preparation time, the hiring of aides, relief from non-academic assignments) so they can keep up with their jobs.

One English teacher who left the profession after 15 years — “burned out” — said she was assigned five classes in her last year of teaching, three of them writing classes of 35 to 38 students. She made all of her own materials for the classes. “With no clerical help, the job was impossible,” she said.

“I was always bothered by the fact that the shop teacher only had to teach as many classes as English teachers. And he could have only 25 students in his class because he had only 25 work stations. But all you need for a writing class are pencils, so I would end up with 35 or more students,” she said.

- **Assignment of too many non-academic duties,** such as coaching athletics, serving as adviser to student newspapers and yearbooks, monitoring of study halls.

- **Too many interruptions of classroom time** for “non-essential activities,” including pep rallies, filling out forms and keeping records, announcements, class trips, collecting of money, and, in general, “trying to accommodate everyone except the classroom teacher.”

- **Reluctance** on the part of teachers of subjects other than English to assign much writing.

- **Inability to keep up with new research findings and “best practices.”** One teacher said: “One of the greatest pleasures for me in attending an inservice session on writing was finding out that I was doing some things right. I’ve been teaching for 25 years, and I try to

keep up with my profession. But I operate in a classroom that is rarely observed by an administrator or another teacher who is knowledgeable about writing. And I don’t get the chance to observe other classes in another school.”

- **Lack of a schoolwide or districtwide sequential plan for instruction in writing.** One teacher told of her district’s successful effort to bring together 40 teachers from district schools to adopt districtwide standards for writing. But she noted, the standards “did not trickle down,” so all teachers are still going their own way.

- **The “political schisms”** in some secondary school English departments. One newly hired teacher admitted to being overwhelmed by a “massive power clique” and “uncomprehending administrators” when she tried to start a movement to set writing standards in her high school. She gave up. “Now I only worry about the standards within my own classroom.”

Another teacher noted that class assignments were a form of political payoff in his school. The teachers who are “in favor” get “the plums.” They are chosen to teach the advanced composition or senior humanities courses. Those who are not “in favor,” he said, are assigned to teach remedial writing.

A third teacher described the “widest of cleavages” in the English department at his school. The teachers have “mutual contempt” for one another, he noted, making agreement on anything impossible.

- **Freedom of choice for students.** In some high schools, students are allowed to pick the social studies and English classes they wish to take; consequently, they get to pick the teachers. “Any teacher who assigns much writing has a good chance of having an empty classroom,” one teacher observed.

- **Fear.** Teachers are afraid of the back-to-basics movement, one teacher said, because they equate it with demands to teach grammar and punctuation instead of writing. Others fear demands for “observable indicators” of student gains in writing.

- **Difficulty of evaluating student writing.**

- California tests all students in grades 3, 6, and 12 annually in reading, written expression, and mathematics as part of the California Assessment Program (CAP). At the third grade level, the median student score in written expression in 1980-81 was at the 54th percentile, or four points above the national average. The median sixth grade score was at the 55th percentile. At grade 12, however, the median score was at the 35th percentile. By comparison, the median grade 12 score in written expression in 1969-70 was at the 42nd percentile.

The CAP does not require students to write; rather it tests their knowledge of writing through a sampling of questions in language choice, paragraphs, sentence recognition, sentence manipulation, capitalization and punctuation, and word forms.

- Texas administers statewide minimum competency tests in writing (along with reading and math) to students in grades 3, 5, and 9. In 1980, ninth graders taking the writing test had to answer 24 multiple-choice questions and to write a persuasive letter to their senator. (Students must pass both portions of the test to be eligible for high school graduation.)

On the multiple-choice portion of the test, 59 percent of the ninth graders passed. On the letter, the range of possible scores was 0-4. A score of 2, 3, or 4 was deemed acceptable for meeting the minimum standard. The results: 40 percent of the ninth graders failed, 58 percent received a rating of 2, and only 2 percent received a rating of 3 or 4.

Approximately 66 percent of the state's black ninth graders failed to exhibit minimum competency in writing, as did 55 percent of the Hispanic students and 32 percent of all other students. In all, approximately 90,000 or 40 percent of Texas ninth graders required remedial instruction and reassessment of their writing skills following the 1980 test.

Why?

"Why Johnny Can't Write," the cover story in the Dec. 10, 1975, issue of *Newsweek*, called public attention to the "writing crisis." It blamed the "crisis" mainly on educators.

Following the *Newsweek* article, many organizations and individuals issued statements about the causes of the problem. For example, Clifton Fadiman and James Howard of the Council for Basic Education said in *Empty Pages* (Fearon Pitman Publishers, Inc., Belmont, Calif.; 1979): "The writing done or not done today is a result of ideas and attitudes that pervade society. It is not chargeable to the school world; it is a cultural and not simply an

educational failure."

Some other reasons given for the decline:

- "An alternate culture, with TV at its heart." — Clifton Fadiman.
- "A distaste for discipline" on the part of pupils and teachers. "Everyone feels that skills should be easy to come by." — Richard Mitchell, author of *The Underground Grammarian* and teacher at Glassboro (N.J.) State College.
- "In a society wired for picture and sound, people write little, spending most of their time looking, listening, and speaking. Children and business executives alike take phone rather than pen in hand." — Fred M. Hechinger, editorial page writer, *The New York Times*.

In interviews for this report, school administrators and writing experts gave numerous reasons for student writing problems, but they focused on three areas: (1) the teachers, (2) the schools, and (3) the way writing is taught.

Why? The Teachers

Preparation: Neither elementary nor secondary teachers — even the English majors — have been prepared to teach writing. Teacher certification requirements similarly neglect writing.

Keith Caldwell, a Fremont, Calif., high school teacher who has conducted at least 100 inservice training workshops on writing nationwide, begins training sessions with this question: "Could you please tell me what institution of higher education taught you how to teach writing?" A silence falls, Caldwell noted, because the participants — elementary, secondary, and college teachers — can give no answer.

Attitude: Many teachers admit they do not feel comfortable in teaching writing; therefore, it is not surprising they de-emphasize it in their classrooms or stick to drill and multiple-choice tests of punctuation, usage, spelling, and grammar. Teachers, like other adults, often don't write much. Inability or unwillingness to write, experts say, translates into inability or unwillingness to teach writing.

Impediments: The bane of English teachers, according to their own testimony, is the paperwork they must do if they are to correct every word students write. Teachers who have received no training in the teaching of writing know little about alternatives they can use to deal with the paperwork, nor do they realize they do not have to correct every word students write to turn out good writers.

Secondary English teachers, who bear the brunt of teaching writing, also complain that they alone

cannot encourage, teach, correct, and grade all student writing. Some boldly or wistfully suggest that all of their colleagues — including history teachers, math teachers, basketball coaches — should share responsibility for the teaching of writing. Teachers in subject areas other than English, however, also lack training and confidence to teach writing. Another problem is convincing these teachers of the importance of assigning writing, not to help English teachers, but to do their own jobs better. Fadiman and Howard put it this way in *Empty Pages*: "It's not a matter of students learning to write in, say, math or social studies class but more a matter of students *writing to learn* math or social studies."

Why? The Schools

Low priority: "Much of the writing problem stems from a failure to give writing a systematic place in the school curriculum," Arthur N. Applebee of Stanford University told federal officials at a meeting in Washington, D.C.

An investigation of writing headed by Applebee revealed that only about 3 percent of the class time or homework assignments of secondary students involved writing activities. In the 1979 writing assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, one-third of the 13-year-olds and one-fourth of the 17-year-olds reported they had written either one report or no report as part of any school assignment during the six weeks preceding the assessment. A third indicator of the amount of writing in schools came from students participating in the 1980-81 California Assessment Program. Approximately 65 percent of the grade 12 students wrote fewer than four essays in the six weeks preceding the assessment. More than 22 percent of these students, moreover, reported having written no essays during that period.

Inconsistency: In an interview for this report, Kim Davis, director of Subject A at the University of California at Berkeley, blamed poor performance in writing on the lack of standards on writing within schools, the lack of sequential instruction, and the lack of agreed-upon ways of responding to student writing. The members of a school's English department, he said, often are unwilling to "unbend" or agree to standards, "and the students are the losers. One teacher will insist on one thing, the next teacher

will be 'deaf' on the topic," Davis said. Consistency in a school writing program is absolutely necessary, he added.

Davis, who visits California high schools regularly, noted that principals sometimes avoid a problem rather than trying to solve it. In some districts, he explained, teachers discard the curriculum, and the principal "won't bite the bullet" when he finds out about it. One teacher, for example, may assign students the same topic year after year; some teach the essay exclusively; others work almost entirely on literature. "There's no consistency of response by the teachers, and the kids bump from pillar to post," he said.

Davis said another problem can crop up in districts that have a good writing program on paper: staff members may choose not to pay attention to the agreed-upon program, "and they get away with it. The reasons for the inconsistency are strange and hard to understand," Davis concluded.

Why? The Way Writing Is Taught

Teachers teach as they were taught, "and their impressions of what constitutes effective teaching of writing are similar to those of the general public," said Donald Graves, professor of education at the University of New Hampshire, in *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*. Often, Graves said, this means: "Make it neat, space the letters, spell good, and know words" or "make it long, not messy, with no mistakes."

What often happens, too, noted one official of the Bay Area Writing Project, is that high school English teachers teach the subject they prefer — literature — all year long, until the end of the year when they realize they have not taught students anything about writing. Then they try to jam it into the last three weeks of school. At the other extreme, the official said, is the teacher who teaches "bits and pieces," not real writing, all year long: parts of speech in September, parts of a sentence in October, the paragraph in November, and so on.

It is only within the past 10 years that researchers have started to tell teachers they should be paying more attention to the process of writing (how to write) and less to the product (what students turn out) or to the mechanics, such as punctuation, grammar, spelling. Consequently, classroom practice is just starting to reflect this change.



Two Authorities Talk About Writing

Writing is a household word at the University of New Hampshire. It employs two of the country's best known authorities on the teaching of writing: Donald Graves and Donald Murray.

In the following interviews for this report, Graves and Murray comment on the problems in teaching writing, where we are today, and how school administrators can improve the teaching of writing in their own districts.

An Interview with Donald Graves

Donald Graves is well known among teachers of writing for his research on how young children learn to write.

*In *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*, Graves reported on the status of writing in the mid to late 1970s. (Available from the Ford Foundation, P.O. Box 559, Naugatuck, Conn. 06710; 1978; \$2.95.)*

Graves heads the Writing Process Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire. Its activities include research on the writing process, working with school districts, and conducting courses at the university on the teaching of writing.

Note: Reprints of 23 articles on writing (about 380 pages) are available from the laboratory for \$10. (Order from the Writing Process Laboratory, Department of Education, University of New Hampshire, Durham, N.H. 03824.)

Q. You said in the report you wrote for the Ford Foundation that writing, as one of the basics, was not getting its due. What is the current situation?

A. It definitely is getting better. We haven't balanced the basics yet, however, because we have so

far to go in helping teachers teach writing. We have decades of problems to overcome because most of us teach as we have been taught, and much has got to be done. But at least, from the standpoint of state systems, local systems, and city systems, most now have the objective of doing something in writing that they did not have at the time I wrote *Balance the Basics*.

Q. Where is the greatest need in writing now — at the elementary or secondary level?

A. All over, but it is much more difficult to make improvements at the secondary level.

Q. For what reason?

A. English teachers, to whom the task has been given, are in such a bind on the curriculum. They have to teach literature; they have to teach grammar; many of them get reading thrown in. Some even get into drug education and other things. They don't have the flexibility of the elementary teacher in a self-contained classroom, so time is a real problem. And the teacher load is very different for the secondary teacher. Another reason is this: If I am an 11th grade teacher, I have kids who have had 11 years of avoidance in writing and my task is to pick them up and turn them around. The 10th grade teacher or whoever had the kids before gets blamed for doing a poor job. This is not the case. It's the circumstances. The job of the secondary teacher is a very difficult one.

Q. What other constraints do you see?

A. Writing needs to be taught much more as a laboratory subject. This seems to be on the increase in some cases, at least as an elective in the secondary schools. Otherwise, it is very difficult — almost impossible — to teach writing if it is taught only on a once- or twice-a-week basis.

Q. What if the teacher is able to have students

write at least once a day in class?

A. If you can get into a once-a-day situation, that certainly helps a lot. Then comes the next question: How do you respond to kids' work? That is where the teacher preparation work is needed. And there is another big problem that has to be overcome: getting the teachers to write and having the kids see the teachers writing.

Q. Is there an over-emphasis now on minimum competencies?

A. Yes, simply because when you teach to the minimum, that is what you get.

Q. If schools were not required to bring students up to a minimum level of competency, would they ignore writing altogether?

A. Yes, that is possible. I know the minimum competency law in New York has opened up interest in writing that was not there before. The problem is this: If you teach to the least common denominator in a writer, you are not going to boost things much. On the other hand, that syndrome does not have to prevail. What we are trying to do is to piggyback on all of this and say, "there is another way; we can take advantage of the minimum competency movement." New York has done a marvelous job of this. I was very impressed with what the New York Department of Education is doing.

Q. Are there any textbooks or other materials available that incorporate the new research findings on the teaching of writing as a process?

A. I haven't seen a textbook series yet that has a process approach, that brings the writer along, and that handles skills in context. There are a lot of materials out now that have the word "process" in them, but if you look closely at them, the process is not there. I wish I could recommend one, but at this point I can't.

Q. Would you recommend caution to a district interested in buying new materials on the teaching of writing?

A. That's right. To be honest, though, you don't need a textbook series to put in a writing program.

Q. What would you advise districts to do instead?

A. I have been advising districts to put available money into help for the teachers so they know how to do a writing program. It's just about impossible to come up with a textbook series that would in fact develop writing skills in students because so much is determined by the transaction between the teachers and the kids, as editors and writers.

Q. What kind of help for the teacher are you talking about?

A. Helping them with their own writing and helping them with the actual teaching of it. Aides could also be considered as part of the help a school district could give a teacher.

Q. Are you still concerned that schools are overemphasizing grammar, penmanship, spelling?

A. Yes, but not quite as concerned as I was. It is still a major problem, however, simply because of this: When a teacher has not had help with his or her own writing, he or she automatically goes for the thing they have been prepared for. And, once again, this is what the language arts textbooks offer — exercises in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. That becomes the writing program because the teacher doesn't know where to go from there. Teachers leap for those exercises like leaping for a life preserver, and I can't blame them. And worst of all, the kids kind of like it. On the other hand, kids don't like it when they have an open-ended assignment such as, "I want you to put down five things you could write about, choose one of those, and be prepared to defend your subject." That brings absolute terror in the ranks.

Q. Many districts seem to be revising their curriculum guides to include a "scope and sequence" for writing (i.e., an exact listing of when writing skills are to be taught). Is this a good thing to do?

A. There is a major problem with scope and sequence. I've seen kids in the second grade who can easily do the things that are included in a scope and sequence for someone age 11, and I've seen some 11-year-olds who can't handle what might remotely be for their grade level. One of the findings of our three-year research study on writing is that students do learn skills if they are taught when and where the students need them. Here is an example: We found that one-third of 6-year-old students were using quotation marks with accuracy, but most scope and sequence guides don't introduce quotation marks until the students are 10 years old. That is not a reflection on how bright the kids are, but rather on the importance of introducing skills when they are needed.

Q. Would you advise districts to forget about scope and sequence?

A. I would not tell districts to abandon them. They should, however, get into some process of evolution that does in fact accommodate the incredible things that kids can do.

Q. How much time should a district allow to establish a quality writing program?

A. I would like to see a district on a five-year schedule.

Q. Could you suggest a blueprint for districts to follow?

A. I would suggest following the plan Paul Eschholz is using in Vermont (see Chapter VI), and the one we are using in New Hampshire. The plan calls for starting in the first year by providing training for a small portion of the staff of a school and by training administrators. Initially, go for people who are interested and enthused about the program. They should be given two to three weeks' intensive work in working on their own writing. The teachers then start to teach writing in their classrooms and, by the second half of the first year, they should be ready to open up their classrooms for observation by other teachers in the district. You negotiate this with teachers; you don't open up their classrooms until they are ready.

In the second year, you train the teachers who observed the teachers using the program in the first year. The first-year teachers, in fact, should take responsibility for a healthy chunk of the inservice training of the second-year teachers. The second-year teachers then start to use writing in their classrooms. The idea is to train more of the staff each year.

By the third year, the first-year people will have two years of experience in the teaching of writing; they can be given more responsibility for inservice training.

By the third or the fourth year, you should try to get at least one building in which 65 to 70 percent of the staff would be trained. One building should "go for broke" before the writing program is legislated for the whole district. The district should designate persons — preferably local teachers — who can go to work with teachers in their classrooms and with administrators in setting up a program. This would require providing for released time for these people. The district might also release some teachers so they can visit model classrooms in which an experienced teacher is teaching writing well. The district should try to have model classrooms or model schools open for staff visitation.

By the fifth year, the writing program should be well under way.

Q. If you were a superintendent, would you legislate a writing program for all buildings in your district?

A. No. I would just keep upping the ante for each

building to join in the writing program.

Q. How would you up the ante?

A. The interesting thing is that when you have (1) the students involved in publishing, (2) the teachers publishing, and (3) teachers sharing their writing and getting a heck of a kick out of it with the kids, the writing program will take care of itself. It will spread on its own.

Q. In this kind of approach, do you start with the English teachers exclusively?

A. No, that is the biggest mistake we can make, because of the way English teachers were taught. Speaking from my own experience, the worst preparation I ever had for the teaching of writing was as an English major. All I did was write about literature and I got everything killed on the first draft. Most English teachers are not prepared to teach writing.

Include English teachers in retraining efforts, of course, because they have the major responsibility for teaching writing. But other teachers should also be involved in a writing program from the start. The people who turn around fastest, I find, are teachers in grades K-6. I think that is because they don't have so much bad training to get over.

Q. Would you start with both elementary and secondary schools at the same time?

A. Yes, starting a writing program is easiest in the elementary schools, but I would still start with teachers from all levels at the same time. Rather than worrying about this question, however, I believe school district planners should focus on when certain things should get done — when, for example, do you concentrate on helping kids get information into their writing; when do you worry about editing skills?

Q. How important is it that administrators be trained in the writing process?

A. Very important. The administrators — superintendents and principals — who participated in the Vermont program found out about their own writing and about what it meant to start a writing program in their schools. In our own program in New Hampshire, we are also starting to train administrators.

Q. Are administrators as terror-stricken as teachers about their writing?

A. Yes, almost everybody is. Everybody has the same problems.

Q. Who should be responsible for monitoring the

writing program in a building?

A. The principal and the teachers together. The principal should convene meetings and meet with the teachers. When the principal has written himself or herself and has been trained in the writing process, he or she has every right to put in his or her two cents' worth. Besides, I've found in buildings where the writing program is going well, you can't keep the principals out. There's too much in it for them personally. It's amazing how administrative things of a less important nature disappear. I haven't found any buildings where things are going especially well that the principal is not involved.

Q. What are the most difficult constraints to starting a writing program at the secondary level?

So many secondary schools — rural, suburban, and urban — are in explosive situations. Often, writing can be the solution to many problems in these schools, but to break through with secondary teachers is really tough. It's not that they are not willing; it's like asking someone to study navigation in the midst of a hurricane. I'm sympathetic with the teachers; it's so hard for them.

Q. What can be done?

A. A number of things. One of the problems in the secondary schools is access to students. If teachers could have students longer — for more than one period a day, and for more than one year — that would help. Some schools have made writing a laboratory subject — which it is — and the teacher will have the same students for the sophomore and junior years. It takes time to get to know students — and for students to know the teacher. Time is needed to establish the relationship between the two as editor and writer. If teachers had students longer, they could work better together. And if administrators would look at the interrupted-ness of the school day, they would rethink a lot of instruction. Another thing that helps a lot is publishing. I believe this will help writing more than anything else. Something happens when students at any grade level, K-12, have to put their writing on the line for other audiences. So a good thing for administrators to do is to provide help to teachers in publishing student work.

Q. Aren't you just asking teachers to take on another job — that of publisher?

A. No, it's a shift of emphasis. Instead of asking teachers to take home 100 papers every night and red-lining them, I am saying "look at what needs to be published and then put more responsibility back on the kids to get their papers to a state where they

can be published — for example, to put them in good handwriting." Parents will do a tremendous job in helping their kids get their papers ready for publication when they know the papers are going to be seen by other audiences. It is one of the best things parents can get involved in, and they do. The teacher can say to the parents, after the first papers are published, "I would like to do more of this, if someone could come in and help on the publishing and binding." Parents respond.

Q. At what point should a school or district try to find out where students are in the writing program?

A. Teachers keep track on two fronts: (1) by maintaining folders of student work and (2) through holistic scoring of student papers at least twice during the year, preferably January and May. I also think it is a good idea to have papers assessed twice — at the building level and at the district level. The classroom teacher needs to continually think about what is good writing, so why should samples of student writing be turned over to someone else, thus denying the teacher of the chance of seeing what students can do and what needs to be stressed?

Another way to evaluate student writing is to look at the publication record of a building, in other words, how much published and publishable work is coming out of a building? If the students are being allowed to do enough publishing, that is a form of assessment and that will be a major factor in assuring quality in a writing program. The minute you publish, you bring in other audiences; the minute you bring in other audiences, the fussier you get about your work.

An Interview with Donald Murray

Donald Murray is a Pulitzer Prize winning writer who labels himself a "strange duck" because he is a writer who teaches writing.

*He is the author of *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Houghton-Mifflin; 1968), a textbook used in teacher training, and the outgrowth of a project of the New England School Development Council. The project was headed by Richard Goodman of the University of New Hampshire who, upon leaving his first superintendency in 1965, recognized that pupil learning of writing was "almost nonexistent."*

Murray says he tries to understand the writing process "so he can let teachers and students alike

understand how writing is made." He disclaims being the father of the writing process because, he says, "there are too many illegitimate children around." Nevertheless, he has worked on understanding the process for about 15 years. He is the nation's leading advocate of the conference approach to writing instruction.

One of the developers of the Vermont Writing Program (see Chapter VI), Murray has worked with students, teachers, and schools at all levels. He is currently professor of English at the University of New Hampshire. He also works with reporters and editors on newspapers nationwide "trying to figure out how we make meaning out of nothing, and how we make it clear."

What does he think of this business of writing? "It reveals you and exposes you, and it is a tough racket." But he also believes that it can be learned — by children and by adults.

In the following interview for this report, Murray gives his opinions on "the writing crisis," how writing can be taught, and what school administrators can do to improve writing programs in their schools:

Q. Is writing better or worse today?

A. I don't think we ever had a time when very many people were taught to write well. We had a more elite system like the Europeans when we did not bother to educate many people. In the good old days, the schools were terrible, classes much larger than now, and the teaching of writing about the same as it is now. It wasn't taught, and it wasn't learned. What we have been trying to do in the last few years is to educate many more people. Obviously we didn't try to educate women until very recently. We didn't try to educate people from racial minorities.

I don't think that the writing that is going on today is worse. I think it is a lot better. I see a constant, steady improvement because I see more and more teachers who are interested in teaching writing, who want to teach writing, who are trained to teach writing.

Q. What about charges that we are in a "crisis" situation?

A. One of the things that upsets me about the kinds of things that get into the press — the popular press and the education press — is that people [who write about the "writing crisis"] talk to people who are not writing teachers. I have terrific students. When I go to conventions, when I go to other schools and I meet teachers who are trained to teach writing and who like to teach writing, they say they have

fantastic students. This whole writing crisis in a sense is a statement about literature teachers and grammar teachers and reading teachers and non-English/language arts teachers who feel themselves inadequate to teach writing, who don't know how to teach writing, and who extrapolate from their own experience. It would be like me saying there is a crisis in math teaching. I have no idea if there is a crisis in math teaching. I know that I was not taught it very well and that one of my daughters wasn't taught it very well, but I don't know anything beyond this.

When we get together as writing teachers at whatever level — I work in elementary and secondary schools and colleges — we are always sharing comments about how good students are and about how many good students we have. It doesn't mean 100 percent . . . but I don't find any deterioration in students. I have taught now since 1963. I have some classes that work out better than other classes, but that is often my fault. The majority of my students are very good, and when I go into other classes at every level I see this.

Q. What are some of the problems in trying to teach writing?

A. English teachers in the secondary schools have normally been trained to teach literature and occasionally to teach grammar — although ineffectively. They have not been trained in the teaching of writing at all.

English teachers are very badly educated. I've been an English department chairperson, and I was an English major. The whole way in which you teach literature to adults in the university is not by any means the way to teach writing, and that is the model for secondary school teachers. The literature expert lectures on the finished text and has the students decode that text in the same way the teacher does. If you are going to teach writing, you have to be in a position to decode an unfinished piece of writing. Decoding students' unfinished writing is an entirely different job than decoding a great piece of literature that is already finished. The whole mode of teaching is different; everything is different. The assumption in the literature field has been that if you read good literature you will know how to do it. [That is comparable to saying] because I can watch two excellent teams play football that I can do it. It doesn't hold that reading examples of good literature is the whole ball game. It helps, but it is a very minor part of education.

Q. What are some of the other problems in the teaching of writing?

A. Writing is used for testing, for punishment, for grades, to keep kids under control. One person in our area who was doing some testing found that much of the writing that was going on in schools occurred on Fridays because "what else do you do with the kids but give them assignments on Friday to keep them under control?" They don't learn to write under those circumstances.

Q. What about the inhibiting factors we hear so much about — large class size, the paperwork burden?

A. I go to schools all around the country, and I see successful teaching of writing under all sorts of conditions.

Q. Is higher education changing in the way it teaches writing?

A. I think it is in many, many colleges and universities. Not enough. We are built on a kind of elite model that doesn't work. It doesn't change very easily; it doesn't make much sense. You live in it, and you try to make it better.

I think there is much more effective teaching of composition in the community colleges than there is in the universities — and the least effective teaching of all in the most elite universities. We have a graduate writing program [at the University of New Hampshire], and a high percentage of those we reject come from the so-called very best universities. In many of the best universities, the big thing is to get into them. Once you get in, not much necessarily happens. So you have very, very bright people [students] who have had very little education in many areas. One of them is writing. And that would also be true in art and some other areas.

Q. Do you define the process of writing as prewriting, writing, and postwriting (revising and editing)?

A. More or less. I keep changing the terminology as I investigate it more. I find myself increasingly interested in the activities that go on before the first draft. In a study someone did of my own writing techniques, one finding is that I spend as much as 70 percent of my time on planning and other prewriting activities. Much of what I do in revision is starting over again — planning — and this ties in with what I've seen among the best writers on newspapers and the best students.

Q. Please explain the way you teach writing by conference.

A. Students come to me every week with their work, which I have read or read then, and I let them talk about it. I respond to what they say about their

work. What I am trying to do is to let them tell me what they have written and how they evaluate it, what they think is working. From my experience of reading the piece I respond, but I let them take the lead. I want them to be able to read their own work in such a way that they can make it increasingly better. So I am mostly listening and responding. It is an opportunity for them to confront their work and to talk about it. I will give them whatever help I can on the problems they see. It's very much a responsive teaching.

Q. Do you give them ideas for improvement?

A. I wouldn't withhold information. I point out things such as this: They should use more specific information or they should write with more subject, verb, object sentences, or they ought to tighten up the end. Most of the time I can see 25 or 30 things they ought to do. I try to teach one thing at a time — what they are ready to learn.

If you came to me with something you had written and I thought that the lead wasn't working and the end wasn't working and the middle was sloppy, I would ask you what you thought of the piece. If you were ready to go to work on the end, then I would go to work with you on the end, and I might mention along the way that good endings are often closely related to beginnings — to get you involved with that a bit.

Q. How many times do you have a student revise a piece?

A. Most of the time it is up to the students. I don't force them to revise as much as they want to revise.

Q. How long are the conferences?

A. They can be very short. I actually run 15-minute conferences, but I do a lot of work in which we have conferences of 90 seconds or 2½ to 3 minutes. What you need are short, frequent conferences.

Q. Don't you need a master teacher too?

A. No. We are taught in teaching to be the authority, to take the initiative, to cover everything. Teachers who are doing some writing, so they understand what is going on and where the students are, can pick up these techniques easily. It is amazing how quickly teachers can turn around. But they have to be able and willing to listen. They have to be able and willing to deal with one thing at a time. And then the students will teach them how to teach. It is an individualization of their classes. Good conference teachers cannot be developed very quickly.

Q. Is it possible to teach people to write, no matter what their age?

A. Yes. You can turn people around in college; you can turn them around in nursing homes. The excitement of people to work with writing is just extraordinary. Sometimes in a matter of hours people turn around — when they hear their own voice. In my teaching, I do a lot of public writing on the blackboard. Students see me writing badly, and they join me in writing. This has never happened to them before. They have seen writing as a finished product in a book, polished, flawless, and authoritative.

When they get a chance to write of their own concerns in their own voice and when an audience responds to the writing, it's very exciting business. It doesn't take long to turn people around and then they begin to understand what writing is. It isn't spelling and it isn't grammar; it's something much more important than that, much more challenging.

Q. What advice would you give school administrators who want to improve their writing programs?

A. If I were an administrator, I would find the two or three writing teachers at any level who like to teach writing and who are successful — those teachers for whom students do write and like to write. I would make sure that those teachers have some time to get together on school time to talk about how they teach, to share their teaching and their writing, and to let that cell expand [to include other teachers].

I would support those teachers in what they think they need, not through curriculum plans and things like that, but in how they can work together and find other teachers to join them. Ideally, you would have three, four, or five of these people in a school system. Over a period of time you could get one or two in each school building. Ultimately they would get a colleague in their building to join in.

I think it takes time. I don't think it can be imposed from the top. Some school superintendents want to bring in authorities like myself. I get calls all the time to come in and give a speech, and I pretty much don't do that. I did it; it was a great ego trip for me and it was financially rewarding. But it doesn't make much sense. Superintendents ought to use that money to reward the people who are teaching writing and to get them together with other

people who are doing it. Listen to them and what they think they need.

They can decide if they want to talk with somebody else or what they need to get other people excited about the teaching of writing. Too often an edict comes down from a language arts supervisor or the superintendent that everybody will teach the same way or that some new system will be brought in, or a new systemwide plan is started that says "writing will be taught for 13 minutes every day."

Q. Would you talk a little about curriculum guides?

A. I worked on a curriculum project at one time and had curriculum guides from all over the country. I spent two weeks on them. Then I went to some of the schools and realized that the guides didn't bear any relation to anything. I remember one that had time broken down in fractions of minutes. It said, for example, that students should spend $9\frac{1}{2}$ minutes on a topic sentence. The topic sentence is rarely used in good writing. It's a very bad device that occasionally works well. It's like a two-foot long, left-handed Phillips screwdriver.

When people go out and buy systems, they look for something that is authoritative, that is dictated from the top down, that looks explicit and specific. It may not have any research base at all. It may not be anything that teachers want to do or are willing to do.

Q. How much training in writing do administrators need?

A. It is amazing what you can do in a week. That is what they have done in Vermont and what we are going to do here [in the New Hampshire Writing Project], that is, have administrators come to inservice training for a week, get them writing and sharing each other's writing. I think their attitudes change.

If they get the experience of writing and listening to other people's writing, they begin to see a little bit of what writing is all about.

Writing is so alien to most of us. It is used so rarely that just a little bit of introduction begins to give you a feel for it. That doesn't mean that after one week superintendents can be teachers of writing, but it does mean they begin to see what it is all about. And that can change their attitude.



What Is Known

The most commonly accepted bit of wisdom about the teaching of writing is simply this: writing is a process, and it must be taught that way. This is newfound wisdom, moreover, that started to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Before that time, almost all teachers and consequently all students were taught about the tools of the craft of writing — grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage, and handwriting — but not about the craft itself.

With the realization that writers in the real world used a process, however informal, when they wrote, came the question: Why don't we teach students to use that same process?

Yet, research on the process is so new that the definition keeps changing. From three to nine stages may be covered in the definition: pre-writing, planning, writing a first draft, responding, revising, editing or proofreading, evaluating, writing final copy, and post-writing or publishing.

Most current definitions include these stages:

- **Pre-writing.** At this stage, students are preparing to write or rehearsing to write by talking, thinking, or reading about a topic; by taking notes or gathering information; by starting to plan and organize their thinking; by identifying an audience. The amount of time devoted to the pre-writing stage can be as little as several minutes or as much as several days or weeks or more. It may involve the teacher and students in discussions or individual or group conferences.

- **Writing.** Students develop their thoughts on paper by preparing a first "draft." The main concern is the content, that is, presenting the amount and type of information needed to suit the purpose and the audience for the writing. The writer may write in spurts or gallops. There may be long pauses. The writing at this stage may bear little resemblance to the final product.

- **Revising.** The draft may be read alone by the student, read aloud to the teacher or classmates, or submitted for individual or group discussion, reaction, or suggestions. The writer adds, subtracts, rearranges, and revises what was written in the first draft. The focus is on content. Several more drafts may be produced during the revision.

- **Post-writing.** The writer is now cleaning up and putting everything in order by making final revisions (Do I need everything written here? Do I need more? Have I said what I want to say in the best way possible?). The writer also corrects grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage. The writing is put in final form for presentation to its intended audience. This stage may also include publishing or exposing the writing to a wider audience than the teacher.

NCTE's View

A select committee of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) developed 19 standards for writing programs, which, the committee believes, "will help states and school districts assure that efforts [to improve writing programs in schools] will indeed lead to improvement."

As a prelude to the standards, the committee offered the following definition of writing which, it said, must be understood by planners who want to improve writing programs:

"Writing is a process of selecting, combining, arranging, and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often, longer units of discourse. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables:

- Method of development (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting, persuading).
- Tone (from very personal to quite formal).
- Form (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report).

What Does Research Say About the Teaching of Writing?

An answer to that question is provided by the California Department of Education. Working in cooperation with the Bay Area Writing Project, the department said, "while many practices merit additional research, much is already known about which practices in teaching the writing process are effective." The department went on to identify effective and ineffective practices in its *Handbook for Planning Effective Writing Programs* (California Department of Education, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, Calif. 95814; 1982; single copy, \$1.75).

Here are the department's findings (reproduced here with permission):

- **"Grammar.** Perhaps the most widely ignored research finding is that the teaching of formal grammar, if divorced from the process of writing, has little or no effect on the writing ability of students. Studies from 1906 through 1976 have repeatedly reached this conclusion. It seems to make no difference whether the system taught is traditional, structural, or transformational grammar. Such instruction, when not directly related with the writing process, does not help students improve their writing.

"Furthermore, some researchers have concluded that in programs in which the study of grammar takes excessive time, the effects are negative. They have found that the quality of writing by students enrolled in such programs not only does not improve but may even decline.

"This is not to say that the study of grammar has no place in a writing program. A knowledge of the conventions of the writing of Standard English, including correct grammar and usage, is important to students, particularly when they edit their writing. However, it is best taught when a specific need for it emerges in a student's writing, not in isolation from actual writing. It is the latter approach [i.e., teaching grammar in isolation from actual writing] that is not supported by research.

- **"Sentence combining.** Sentence combin-

ing is a technique for combining short sentences into longer, carefully constructed sentences. Over the past 10 years, several studies of classes from the elementary school level through the first year in college have shown that sentence-combining exercises, both oral and written, conducted with little or no grammatical terminology, can be effective in increasing the sentence-writing maturity of students.

- **"Quantity.** The act of writing frequently does not improve the quality of a student's writing. That is, just increasing the number of writing opportunities without providing appropriate instruction and other learning opportunities does not, in and of itself, result in a significant improvement of students' writing skills.

- **"Response.** On the other hand, some research indicates that writing which includes responses from peers or teachers produces superior results.

- **"Correcting.** Praising what students do well improves their writing more than correction of what they do badly. Intensive correction does no more to improve writing than moderate correction.

- **"Reading.** Writing programs that encourage students to read extensively and that devote time to the study of written prose are effective in improving student writing.

- **"Pre-writing.** Most recently, researchers have been focusing more on the process of writing itself, and less on teacher behavior and writing as a finished product. These researchers have found that an emphasis on pre-writing activities leads to improved student writing. Pre-writing, in this instance, means any exercise, experience, or activity intended to encourage a writer's creative thought prior to the act of drafting his or her manuscript.

- **"Modeling.** Sharing writing with peers, editing in groups, imitating prose models, and encouraging teacher participation in writing assignments are all practices which have resulted in the improvement of student writing."

- Purpose (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal 'business' of everyday life).
- Possible audiences (oneself, classmates, a teacher, 'the world').

"Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages. It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose, and tone of the message.

"Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationship to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous, and continuing effort of all teachers."

Note that NCTE's definition would doom the traditional way in which students have been taught to write. Traditional instruction assumed that students knew what they wanted to say but did not know how to put it in "proper" form. NCTE's definition, on the other hand, implies that teachers must focus on the purpose, meaning, and audience for student writing — at least as much as on the conventions of spelling, vocabulary, usage, and punctuation. Students will learn these conventions, the NCTE committee believes, when they want their writing to be read.

The 19 standards and a comment on each standard from Robert Weiss, director of the Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester, follow:

1. There is evidence that knowledge of current theory and research in writing has been sought and applied in developing the writing program.

Comment: "Publishers' materials do not include current theory and research but merely repeat previous texts and curricula."

2. Writing instruction is a substantial and clearly identified part of an integrated English language arts curriculum.

Comment: "The English language curriculum is so heavy in content that writing would be buried unless given prominence. Reading instruction, which has been king for so long, refers to a passive communication skill; writing is an active skill combining the energies of hand, brain, and eye.

This active skill, not its components of spelling, punctuation, and usage, is what a writing program stresses. . . ."

3. Writing is called for in other subject matters across the curriculum.

Comment: "Writing across the curriculum should mean at least two things: (a) Traditional school assignments (e.g., book reports, summaries) should be made by teachers in every area of curriculum. These assignments should be suited to the subject matter, they should have the same characteristics recommended for the English/language arts curricula, and they should be evaluated according to policies and criteria developed by the individual teacher and by the school as a whole. In all areas of the curriculum, teachers should teach a writing process. (b) Also needed is a systematic program of 'learning-centered writing' referring to brief, subject related tasks that are not evaluated by the teacher. This writing . . . is considered a powerful but rarely tapped means of improving or increasing learning while increasing fluency. . . ."

4. The subject matter of writing has its richest source in the students' personal, social, and academic interests and experiences.

Comment: "Students are best motivated to write, and they perform best when they write about what they know or are learning. . . ."

5. Students write in many forms (e.g., essays, notes, summaries, poems, letters, stories, reports, scripts, journals).

Comment: "In effective writing programs, students will not be limited to writing essays and reports directed only to teachers and written only for a grade."

6. Students write for a variety of audiences (e.g., self, classmates, the community, the teacher) to learn that approaches vary as audiences vary.

Comment: See comment under 5.

7. Students write for a wide range of purposes (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to express the self, to explore, to clarify thinking).

Comment: See comment under 5.

8. Class time is devoted to all aspects of the writing process: generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing.

Comment: "A writing class is not one which is filled with teacher talk, teacher-student dialogue, and writing tests. Rather, it is organized more like a workshop in which students go through group

and individual exercises to generate ideas, then compose rough drafts, then revise, then receive additional response, then redraft, and then edit for correctness. False starts, misorganization, errors — these can be tolerated during the process and worked out and eradicated at different stages. A room in which the writing process is taught . . . is often noisy, with students reading their pieces aloud to each other and getting or giving constructive and critical response, and with the teacher holding brief conferences with individuals or groups. Students frequently work on specific group projects." [See also comment under 9.]

9. All students receive instruction in both developing and expressing ideas and using the conventions of edited American English.

Comment: "Recent evidence suggests that writing improves when students are put through a complete writing process, when they are taught various techniques for generating ideas, and when they are taught grammar and 'mechanics' as issues appear in their own writing efforts. . . . Almost all evidence discounts the effectiveness of [traditional] grammar instruction and related exercises or drills in improving writing performance."

10. Control of the conventions of edited American English (supporting skills such as spelling, handwriting, and grammatical usage) is developed primarily during the writing process and secondarily through related exercises.

Comment: See comment under 9.

11. Students receive constructive responses — from teachers and from others — at various stages in the writing process.

Comment: "Skillful teachers of writing do not merely make assignments, collect the results, and evaluate them. Rather, they intervene — and teach students how to aid each other in intervening — at the idea-generating stage, between drafts, and before final publication. Further, teacher responses that encourage a positive attitude toward writing are more effective than criticism in improving subsequent performance by students."

12. Evaluation of individual writing growth is based on complete pieces of writing; reflects informed judgment, first, about clarity and content and then about conventions of spelling, mechanics, and usage; and includes regular responses to individual pieces of student writing as well as periodic assessment measuring growth over a period of time.

Comment: "No standardized or short-answer test

"Effective writing involves many different skills, from the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure to the rhetorical and organizational skills necessary to tell an engaging story or to build an effective argument. Mechanical errors are highly visible and easily seized upon by the critics of a school. But an effective program must keep these skills in perspective, as means to other ends. Students must learn to write for real purposes, to convey messages or construct arguments for readers who will respond to what has been said — not just to mechanical errors. Because writing is a complex task, many of the errors in student work are actually reflections of learning in progress. Students who make no 'mistakes' are probably using only old skills rather than learning new ones."

—Arthur Applebee
Stanford University

measures writing performance or writing ability. In fair evaluation of full pieces of writing, the greatest weight is given to positive accomplishment. No great weight is attached to any one feature of composition, and evaluation is conducted over a period of time."

13. Teachers with major responsibility for writing instruction receive continuing education reflecting current knowledge about the teaching of writing.

Comment: "The best way to implement Standards 13, 14, and 15 is through a concerted series of activities that combine theory with practice, ideas with experiential learning. . . ."

14. Teachers of other subjects receive information and training in ways to make use of and respond to writing in their classes.

Comment: See comment under 13.

15. Parent and community groups are informed about the writing program and about ways in which they can support it.

Comment: See comment under 13.

16. School and class schedules provide sufficient time to assure that the writing process is thoroughly pursued.

Comment: "The only way to implement Standard 16 is to follow numbers 13-15. Sufficient time may

"Good writing is the kind that says what it means while being pleasant to read."

— Jacques Barzun
former professor, Columbia University

mean, among other things, that English/language arts periods or time blocks be lengthened or occasionally doubled, that class size be held down, and that aides, readers, and volunteers be assigned to help with writing."

17. Teachers and students have access to and make regular use of a wide range of resources (e.g., library services, media, teaching materials, duplicating facilities, supplies) for support of the writing program.

Comment: *"One resource in particular is essential for a writing program — duplicating services that can make available multiple copies of students' writing for [the use of] a single class or for a broader audience. Publication of student writing is*

possibly the most powerful motive for producing fluency, meaningful form, and correctness in student prose."

18. Evaluation of the writing program focuses on pre- and post-program sampling of complete pieces of writing, utilizing a recognized procedure (e.g., holistic rating, the Diederich scale, primary trait scoring) to arrive at reliable judgments about the quality of the program.

Comment: *"All writing programs may be evaluated most effectively by the means recommended in Standards 18 and 19. Reliable quantitative data based on assessment of whole pieces of writing may be gathered through holistic assessment. Qualitative data are equally important to present to the public."*

19. Evaluation of the program might also include assessment of a sample of student attitudes; gathering of pertinent quantitative data (e.g., frequency of student writing, time devoted to writing activities); and observational data (evidence of prewriting activities, class anthologies, writing folders, and student writing displays).

Comment: *See comment under 18.*

Evaluating Your Writing Program

School administrators and writing supervisors may wish to use the following chart as a checklist to evaluate a school writing program.

The chart shows the differences in instruction and outcome that occur when writing is *assigned* (following the traditional approach) and when writing is

taught (following an approach based on current thinking on the composing process).

The chart was prepared by Cecelia Kingston, a former English teacher and language arts coordinator, who now is a consultant to school districts on writing.

When Writing Is Assigned

1. Teacher asks students to write on one topic from a list of topics which may or may not be related to content of the course or experiences of the students.
2. Topic or question is usually general, rarely structured.
3. Topic allows for sloppy thinking, glittering generalities.
4. Audience for paper is rarely identified.
5. Purpose for writing assignment is nebulous or vague.
6. Students assume they are writing for a grade.

When Writing Is Taught

1. Teacher encourages students to communicate their ideas precisely and effectively through writing.
2. Topic or question is usually specific, often highly structured.
3. Topic forces precise thought, supporting details.
4. Audience for paper is specifically identified.
5. Purpose for writing assignment is specifically articulated.
6. Students know they are writing to improve their ability to express themselves precisely.

When Writing Is Assigned

7. Students are often asked to write spontaneously.
8. Students are often given a time limit or a work limit or both.
9. Students are required to hand in the first draft for a grade.
10. Teacher comments on paper are usually negative, most often corrections of errors.
11. Corrections are usually in reference to mechanical errors.
12. Usually every error is corrected on every page by the teacher.
13. Most of the teacher's time is spent correcting papers.
14. The teacher corrects every paper.
15. Students never quite know how teacher arrives at grades.
16. All writing assignments tend to be essays — usually between 200-300 words.
17. Students are criticized for not making the purpose clear, for not organizing thoughts logically, for not developing ideas.
18. Students are not aware of significant improvement in their writing.
19. Students are asked to analyze, compare, describe, define, review, trace, but are not taught how to organize their thoughts to succeed in their goals.
20. Students are required to rewrite — in some cases. But rewriting usually only applies to corrections in grammar, usage, etc.
21. Students are required to write without much *pre-thought*.
22. Students rarely know what style means or what their own style is.
23. Students are assigned a number of different writing experiences: poem, play, book review, term paper.
24. Students and teacher are bored by what students write.

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When Writing Is Taught

7. Students are encouraged to think about their subjects.
8. Students are encouraged to judge the scope of the purpose in terms of the time available and the number of words it would take to fulfill this purpose.
9. Students are encouraged to review and revise the first draft.
10. Teacher comments stress the positive and are constructive about the negative aspects.
11. Recommendations for improvement in style, format, and organization of thoughts are made.
12. Often only certain elements of composition — errors — are corrected for a specific assignment.
13. Most of the teacher's time is spent in class teaching the writing skills.
14. The teacher encourages self-evaluation and group evaluation of most of the papers.
15. Students always know why they earn a grade.
16. Writing assignments vary in length according to purpose of the assignment.
17. Students are taught how to limit purpose, organize thoughts, and develop ideas.
18. Students are aware of significant growth — or lack of it — in specific areas.
19. Students are given models of essays which analyze, or compare, etc. and/or they are guided into developing the format best suited for analysis or comparison, etc.
20. Students are encouraged to revise, to edit, to improve — and to correct first draft, then resubmit.
21. Students are motivated into thinking about what they are to write.
22. Students are taught to analyze their own style.
23. Students are taught to handle a variety of writing forms.
24. Students and teacher are excited about what students write.

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Ingredients for Success

In interviews for this report, writing experts, administrators, and teachers were asked to name components of successful writing programs.

Their views varied widely, but a total of 13 components emerged:

1. Administrative leadership. Administrators serve as advocates and provide leadership for writing programs in many ways. In some districts, especially in small districts or those in which the top administrator has a particular interest in English and writing, the superintendent or a central office administrator works with principals in assessing the status of writing and making improvements.

In other districts, the superintendent, although not directly involved in the writing program, nevertheless shows that it has priority through written policy statements, and commitments of time, money, and staff.

2. Evaluation of current situation. A districtwide assessment of student writing is one of the best ways to start or improve a writing program, in the opinion of James Gray, director of the Bay Area Writing Project. For one thing, a districtwide assessment focuses the attention of all students and all teachers on writing. Further, if the writing samples of students are evaluated by the entire staff, who have received training in a scoring technique, all receive firsthand knowledge of how well or how poorly students write.

Some administrators also try to determine how much actual writing (not filling in the blanks) students are doing, or they survey staff or students or both about their attitudes on writing.

3. Staff involvement. "A writing program cannot be one that comes down from on high," said Supt. Roland M. Miller of Lenox, Mass. "There must be commitment in the ranks." Miller believes that administrators must support — and provide emo-

tional reward — for staff members who contribute to the development of a new program. A single person must be an advocate for the writing program, he said, "but that person cannot do anything without the assistance of the staff."

4. Review of research and promising practices. In effective programs, staff members have a chance to review current research and effective practices before being asked to revise the district's English or language arts curriculum.

5. Inservice training and follow-up. Administrators in districts with effective writing programs generally do not force the program on the staff by requiring all teachers to participate in inservice training. Instead, they start with volunteers, assuming that the testimony of these teachers, along with improved student writing, will convince other teachers to participate.

In districts with effective programs, moreover, teachers have opportunities to meet on school time or during the summer at district expense to discuss how to incorporate newly learned writing techniques into the curriculum.

6. Use of outside consultants. Most school districts reach beyond their own staffs in putting together an effective writing program. By bringing in one or more knowledgeable consultants, either as part of or in addition to inservice training for staff members, districts can reduce the amount of guesswork and trial-and-error adjustments that occur in setting up any new program.

7. Someone in charge. In various districts, coordination of the writing program is handled by a language arts specialist, the chairman of the English department, a central office administrator, or building principals. Whoever is given responsibility must know enough about writing to keep the program on

course and to realize when revisions are necessary.

In appointing a coordinator, here are qualities to look for: someone who keeps up on new research in writing, who can operate like a coach in motivating and encouraging staff members, and, preferably, who has classroom experience.

8. Long-term commitment. "The biggest mistake school districts make in implementing a writing program is not planning far enough ahead. It is a three- to five-year venture," advised Paul Eschholz, director of the Vermont Writing Program. "Districts cannot expect to establish a program overnight and to have it functioning in two or three months. A writing program has to be introduced slowly and then built upon."

9. Policy statement. Administrators and teachers from all grade levels should cooperatively put together a statement that incorporates their beliefs about writing and how it should be taught in district schools. (See, for example, the statement about the writing program at Phillips Exeter Academy in Chapter VII.)

10. Sequential program. Ideally, teachers from every grade level are involved in putting together the writing program for their district. At minimum, teachers from different grade levels have opportunities to meet together to share information about the way they teach writing.

11. "Writing across the curriculum." In effective programs, writing is not viewed as a discrete subject, but rather as a part of all subjects. Districts can encourage writing across the curriculum by providing opportunities for teachers of various subjects to discuss how to incorporate writing into their classes and by providing inservice training for them.

12. Publishing. In some districts with effective programs, administrators and teachers have found that publishing students' writing is one of the best ways to motivate them to write. (See suggestions for publishing in this chapter.)

13. Community awareness. Parents, the school board, and other members of the community must be informed of the major changes that a writing program — one which treats writing as a process — will cause in teaching methods. Students will not be learning to write as their parents did. Many of the writing assignments students work on will be considered "drafts," not finished products; consequently, they may contain errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar which are not marked by the teacher.

The district must not only explain its new program but be ready to defend it. One way some districts have explained the writing process is by having teachers demonstrate it at PTA or board meetings. As part of the demonstration, parents and board members write.



Case Study: Lenox, Mass.

Features To Note:

Administrative leadership.

Consistent program, grades 1-12.

Use of outside consultants, when needed.

"We are beginning to see results. The students are not afraid of writing the way they used to be. I think they approach it with a lot more zeal and personal commitment and the notion that they are able to produce something."

Those are the words of Roland M. Miller, superintendent of the 800-student Lenox (Mass.) Public Schools, a district that implemented a writing program in 1977 at both the elementary and high school level. Work on the program started at least a year earlier.

In an interview for this report, Miller cited these reasons for starting a writing program: "We were finding that the kids were running into conflicting expectations: there were some teachers who would bury their nose in Warriner's (a textbook used nationwide), and there were some teachers who were doing diagramming of sentences. It was very unfair to the students. We needed a consistent program — one that the staff would be committed to."

With the hiring of Karen Conklin as chairman of the high school English department, "the school system decided it was going to make a commitment to improving the whole writing process," Miller said. "Karen provided the energy at the high school level, and I began to chair a faculty committee at the elementary level."

"Interested teachers at both the high school and the elementary level did all the work," said the superintendent, a former social studies teacher.

Nevertheless, he continued to work with the elementary school committee and also made sure that Conklin got the training she needed to start putting together a secondary program. Along the way, staff members were inspired by the work of people like Donald Murray and Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire.

Graves was called in as a consultant for an afternoon to address the staff and provide some common understanding of the writing process. At the same time, an elementary teacher who collaborated with Graves in research on writing, Lucy McCormick Calkins, worked with the district's elementary teachers.

The district also got some help from nearby Williams College and called in another consultant, Mara Casey, from Cambridge, Mass., who taught a course on the writing process to both elementary and secondary staff members.

After the district had completed the initial development of the program, some long-time staff members at the high school level balked. "They really did not see writing as their responsibility," the superintendent noted, "but we made it very clear that they had to implement the program." The outcome: "We had some turnover," the superintendent said. "But when we got the right nucleus of people here who were interested in improving writing, we got everything together."

Inservice training for Lenox teachers was provided by Conklin and other teachers in the district. An outside consultant was brought in occasionally, but "as we became more confident, we relied more on our own staff and less on outside people," the superintendent said.

Description of the Program

Conklin described the district's writing program as "an individualized kind of program that asks a great deal of the teachers — not the least of which is a discerning, perceptive, diagnostic mind.

"What we have is not a program that can be just brought into a school. It requires a certain kind of commitment, a certain kind of predisposition, and a great deal of training," she noted.

"The most difficult kind of student to teach in this kind of program is the student who doesn't know how to think," Conklin said. "That has been one of the wonderful benefits of our program. We have found that the kind of rote, mindless learning that has gone on for so long in the name of education simply doesn't work in this kind of program. I have had kids in this program who have done marvelous things. I have had kids who were totally ungramma-

"I have felt for a long time that the public schools have never done what they were capable of in the area of writing."

— Roland M. Miller
Superintendent
Lenox Public Schools

tical succeed in this program. I had a kid who came right from the slums of New York City who started to do some of the most colorful, lively writing I have seen for a long time.

"One of the best things about this program," Conklin summarized, "is that there is no place to hide in it — not for the teachers, not for the students."

At the heart of the program is the belief that writing must be taught as a process. Conklin said the district also:

- Insists on thorough prewriting and "rewriting, rewriting, rewriting."
- Distinguishes between revision and editing.
- Keeps cumulative folders of students' writing as a record of their progress and for diagnostic purposes.
- Places heavy emphasis on peer critiquing.
- Requires students to write for a variety of audiences.
- Encourages students to find their own "voices" as authors.

Elementary teachers are guided by a "writing skills" chart (see illustration) developed by the district, but heavily influenced by the writings and work of people such as Graves.

Teachers at Lenox High School follow the criteria for effective writing developed over a year's time by the English department, under Conklin's leadership.

The criteria are as follows:

Author

- Does the writer seem to have an interest in the subject and a good grasp of the subject?
- Is the author's presence discernible in the tone?

Audience

- Does the paper seem to be written for an identifiable audience?
- Would this audience be interested in reading the paper?
- Are the language and examples appropriate to the audience?

Content

- Is there a clear, controlling idea?
- Is information specific?
- Is language concrete?
- Has the author's purpose been accomplished?
- Is the content significant, original, appropriate to the author's purpose?

Form

- Is the form appropriate for the idea?
- Is the paper well organized?
- Is there a clear relationship between the parts?

- Is there a clear relationship between the parts and the whole?

Style

- Is language imaginative?
- Is there a good mixture of sentences that are long and short, simple and complex?
- Is the paper relatively free of spelling, grammatical, usage problems?
- Are transitions effectively used to make the paper cohesive?
- Has the writer achieved a sound degree of mechanical proficiency?

Lenox (Mass.) Public Schools Writing Program, Grades 1-6

Writing Skills		Grades 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Prewriting	Brainstorming	Intro.* →		Devel.** →	→	→
	Write from personal experience	Intro. (orally/ written)	Devel. →	→	→	→
	Focus on a subject (discovering; selecting)		Intro.	Devel. →	→	→
Writing	Narrow the topic			Intro. →	→	→
	Encourage use of the active voice	Intro. →		Devel. →	→	→
	Show; don't tell (use specifics)		Intro.	Devel. →	→	→
Editing	Sharpen the lead			Intro. →	Devel. →	→
	Prune out irrelevant details		Intro.	Devel. →	→	→
	Supply additional details if necessary		Intro.	Devel.		
Rewriting	Polish word by word			Intro.	Devel. →	
	Improve the organization	simple sentences		expanded sentences	varied sentence structure	establish mood
	Discover the best form of expression			Intro.	Devel. →	
	Editing (spelling, usage, mechanics)	Intro.	Devel. →	→	→	
	*Introduction					
	**Development					

Public Relations

One problem Lenox faced in adopting its process-oriented writing program was the need for public awareness. "The public perception of writing is the same painful process we were all brought up on: the more red ink there is on a student paper, the better. If the red ink is missing, you must be doing something wrong," Conklin noted.

In Lenox, however, the teachers strongly stress rewriting. In several expository courses taught by Conklin, for example, the students may complete only three papers in a quarter, but they may write up to 10 drafts per paper.

District representatives — particularly Miller and Conklin — assumed responsibility for explaining the program and what the district hoped to achieve to any group that wanted information. In addition, parents received letters about the program, and the school board was kept informed of progress. A teacher would call parents when a complaint was brought to the attention of the staff.

One sixth-grade teacher sent home a cover letter about the program to the parents of each of his students, along with all of the scraps, drafts, modifications, and the final writing of a paper — everything, literally, from beginning to end. In the letter he explained all the steps in the writing process. "He took on an elaborate and time-consuming job," Conklin said, "but it helped gain community acceptance of the writing program."

Assessment

Lenox complies with the state's basic skills requirements by assessing student writing annually, using a state-developed test, and involving all teachers in holistic scoring.

The assessment "has been helpful to us," Miller commented, "because it is an annual monitoring device. But, by itself, it would be woefully inadequate as a way to evaluate student writing."

Staff members periodically evaluate student writing by other means, particularly by the work that is contained in cumulative folders. The folders are passed on as students progress through the grades, to give the teacher at the next grade an idea of the strengths and weaknesses of each student.

Prop 2½ Threatens Program

The passage of Proposition 2½ by Massachusetts voters has caused the district to slow down in its effort to thoroughly integrate writing into all subjects. "We haven't given up on it," Miller said. He added, however, that the larger class sizes are

having a negative effect on the writing program.

Class size in Lenox rose, on the average, from 16-17 to 23-24. One effect is that teachers have less time to hold individual writing conferences with students. The district was forced to make a 20 percent cut in staff, which has meant some reshuffling and new assignments. Consequently, these people have required time and training to settle into their new jobs. Introducing them to the writing program has been postponed.

Miller, who said he "has always had time to get involved in at least one curricular or instructional issue each year," is now having to spend time on fuel bids and bus contracts because the district eliminated the position of business manager. "I miss the involvement with the instructional program," he noted.

The elementary principal, although given greatly expanded job duties, has tried to take responsibility for monitoring the elementary writing program.

At the secondary level, Conklin is responsible for keeping the writing program on course, although her class load has been increased from two or three classes to four plus a study hall. She noted the increased difficulty of coordinating the efforts of the high school and elementary writing programs. "We hope to continue to find time to do that sort of thing. At least," she noted, "our approaches are completely consistent, and the groundwork has been laid. We know we are working in the same direction."

Miller, who remains "cautiously optimistic" about the future of the writing program, summarized: "I think there is enough commitment that we are not going to let things slip."



Case Study: Charlotte, N.C.

Things To Note:

- One coordinator, K-12.
- Administrative support.
- Many opportunities for inservice training.
- Long-range plan.

Large school districts can have an effective writing program — with enough time, persistence, and the coordinating strategy and leadership of a Genie Ball. She is English specialist (a title equivalent to

"There is such a thing as bad writing. It's full of errors, poorly organized, and doesn't say anything."

— Anonymous

supervisor or director of English) for the 77,000-student Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, N.C., a district with 104 schools.

Ball was hired in 1977 to fill the position, which had been empty for about 15 years. The first thing she did, she said in an interview for this report, was to visit English classes all over the district. She found that most senior high teachers were giving only objective tests — "in the interest of saving time" — and that students were not being asked to respond to anything in writing other than book reports or research papers. All of the teachers assumed they had to teach "all of the grammar" in the first semester of each year and writing in the second semester. Moreover, Ball said, students were writing basically about literature.

At the elementary level, Ball found an excess of ditto sheets, textbook work, and exercises, and, in some schools, a creative writing period. But the teachers who allowed creative writing considered it sacrosanct. They did not grade or evaluate the work because they believed that doing so might destroy the self-image of students.

Ball also noticed that teachers were confused about the effectiveness of what they were doing. "A teacher might say to me, 'Here's Johnny making a 100 on every test I give on sentence fragments, and yet when he writes, it's full of sentence fragments. What can I do?' It became very obvious to me," the English supervisor said, "there was no transfer of skills and that we needed to give teachers direct instruction in writing."

A Year of Planning

Ball spent the rest of the year meeting monthly with groups of chairpersons of the senior high English departments and language arts representatives of the elementary and junior high schools. "We became aware there was a lot of repetition across grade levels. That first year, most of my time was spent in saying, 'Maybe we need to decrease the repetition and break down skills we will address at different grade levels.'"

Freeing teachers of guilt was a big problem. Teachers felt guilty, Ball said, if they didn't cover everything. "If you are trying to cover the grammar, the spelling, the vocabulary, the literature, and the speaking, listening, and observing skills set forth in the state curriculum guidelines, then you don't feel you have any time to teach writing," she noted.

First Inservice Offered

In 1978, Ball looked for a person with direct experience in the teaching of writing to act as a consultant to the district. "Our teachers at that point were overburdened with paperwork, with integration, with changes in student population every year, and changes in teacher assignments. They needed instruction on practical application of writing techniques, not theory."

Ball hired Prof. Anita Moss of the University of North Carolina, who offered a 20-hour workshop during the summer, open to any secondary teachers who wanted to participate. Ten English teachers took advantage of the offer.

"Dr. Moss did exactly what I wanted her to do; she gave them the application," Ball added that she realized the impact of effective instruction when an older secondary English teacher, who had been used to teaching grammar and literature, completely revised her teaching methods after going through the training. This teacher set up a highly effective writing workshop with her students. At the end of the first semester in which she used the workshop, 29 sets of parents attending a PTA function told her: "My child has enjoyed English more than he ever has in his entire life."

Writing Project Gets Started

In 1979-80, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools helped start the University of North Carolina Writing Project (an offshoot of the Bay Area Writing Project) by matching the funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The project now holds an annual five-week summer inservice training session in writing, which can serve approximately 25 applicants per year. In the summer of 1981, 50 persons applied; 28 were accepted.

Half of each day in the summer sessions is spent in writing, the other half in a class where the participants both teach a demonstration lesson in writing and learn the methods of teaching writing advocated by experts in the field.

To get ready for the summer session and before preparing a demonstration lesson, the participating

Survey Respondents Tell What's Important in Teaching Writing

The survey for this report asked for the "three most important considerations in efforts to improve the teaching and learning of writing."

Here are some of the responses:

"Acceptance by staff that there is a need to improve the quality of student writing; a clear understanding of exactly how the writing needs to improve; a way to evaluate the improvements." — Sheryl Kaiser, director of curriculum, Waverly Schools, Lansing, Mich.

"Recognition of need; commitment to the task by the board, administration, faculty, parents; teacher training; time in the curriculum; ongoing follow-through; supportive help." — Frances H. Hale, superintendent, School Administrative District #62, Pownal, Maine

"Make teachers aware of the need; involve teachers in inservice programs; coordinate curriculum, especially elementary to junior high to senior high; assign staff time to follow up and 'ride herd.'" — Roger Doucet, Independent School District #738, Holdingford, Minn.

"Consistency within the district — agreement on what is important and how to teach it; involvement by administration as well as teaching staff; guidelines which teachers can follow." — Herb Jensen, director of curriculum, Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools, Flint, Mich.

"Released time for staff to evaluate written composition; district mandate to improve writing; annual review of student theme folders to assess both teacher and student output; frequent writing." — Jack R. Harf, assistant superintendent, Governor Mifflin Schools, Shillington, Pa.

"Emphasis on the process of writing, not just on products; provision of adequate release

time and support services to composition teachers; consistent districtwide emphasis on the value of writing." — Edward J. Rachford, superintendent, District 233, Flossmoor, Ill.

"Familiarizing teachers with promising new research and techniques of teaching composition; stressing the process of writing; encouraging teachers to write themselves so they are aware of the problems of students and to exchange information on successful writing practices; providing for frequent, sequential writing experiences for students not only in language arts classes but also across disciplines." — John Ellis, superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Tex.

"Teachers must be aware of the prewrite, write, revise process as an important step in teaching writing. Administrators must realize that English teachers spend hours after school and at night reading student compositions; therefore, smaller classes are a must. Students must be encouraged to write by all teachers, not just English teachers. Clarity, organization, focus, and mechanical correctness should be emphasized in every subject." — Patricia Bower, elementary consultant, Charleston County School District, Charleston, S.C.

"Make it enjoyable; consistency across the curriculum in stressing its importance; ongoing evaluation of the program." — Daniel F. Kowaleski, director of instruction, Branchburg Township School District, Somerville, N.J.

"School system commitment to composition across the curriculum and through the grades; clarity, simplicity, and system/community-wide understanding of writing goals; requisite resources to train staff in implementing and assessing system goals." — Donald G. Kauffman, supervisor of English/Language Arts, Prince George's County Schools, Upper Marlboro, Md.

teachers are required to read a list of books on writing methods, including works by Peter Elbow, Donald Graves, and James Moffett.

Additional Training

In addition to the summer sessions, the district conducts inservice workshops through its own staff development center. The workshops preach the same message as the summer session — that writing should be taught, starting in kindergarten, as a process that includes prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and evaluating.

The workshops are voluntary and are generally structured to serve groups of teachers in grades K-3, 4-6, or 7-12. All are coordinated through Ball, who either teaches the workshops herself or calls on some of the district's trained teacher/consultants or outsiders.

In 1980-81, 1,000 teachers (out of 4,000 in the district) went through a 10-hour or 15-hour workshop.

Can teachers obtain enough know-how in such a brief workshop to start teaching the writing process? Ball answered this way: "You can help them enough in that amount of time so they can see there is something different, and that there is an approach. Most of the time when we do a workshop, the teachers will come back for more or apply to the writing project for the five-week summer session. Those who come to the summer session or to two or three workshops or to some of the writing conferences we sponsor are the people who form a nucleus within different schools. That is what makes the writing program spread."

What is the effect of the training? "I think you could go into any school in this district and talk about a writing process and writing development,

"There is a way of teaching to tests; there is a way of reacting to needs; there is a way of planning for something that will stay. Writing is an extremely difficult task. The teachers have not been prepared to teach it; they have been prepared as grammarians and literature specialists. If change to a real writing program is slow enough, however, I think it will last."

— Genie Ball
English Specialist
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

and teachers would respond to you with understanding," Ball said.

"I've been very patient about this," she added, "and this year (1981) is the first year that I can take visitors to specific schools and teachers' classes and know in advance that they will see total writing instruction and improvement."

District Priority

The superintendent included the improvement of writing in a published list of his objectives in both 1980 and 1981. It was objective No. 9 in 1980, but it was moved to fourth place the following year. "That means," said Ball, "that every feeder area is required to plan a writing program to improve the skills of all students." [The district is divided into eight feeder areas, each administered by an area superintendent.]

The plans must guarantee that writing will be emphasized. Ball reviews all of the plans, but since she is in on the groundwork of all planning and inservice efforts in the district, she anticipates that each feeder area will incorporate the district's philosophy about writing in its plan.

District support is more than verbal, Ball said. It continues to fund the University of North Carolina Writing Project, and it allows released time for teachers to attend inservice workshops. In some cases, individual schools and feeder areas have used all of their discretionary money to provide teachers with training in writing.

Coordinating and Evaluating School Efforts

Ball helps keep schools and feeder areas on course through another job she handles: evaluation of the writing program. She visits every English class or language arts class in a building and then meets after school with the faculty to give them her assessment of their writing program. "Invariably they will ask questions about writing that will stimulate a request for a workshop," Ball said.

Additional support for writing comes from "school coordinating teachers" in each school. They have no classroom duties; they work only on curriculum coordination.

Ball provided four days of inservice training for these teachers to show them how to recognize strengths and weaknesses in the writing programs in their schools. They sometimes provide instruction in writing at faculty meetings, but, for the most part, they coordinate inservice workshops through Ball. The teachers also go into the classroom to give

demonstration lessons in writing.

Principals in some of the feeder areas have gone through a short session on the writing process. "Generally school principals do not really have the time to go through the long sessions," Ball said, "so I always do a short overview to give them an idea of what we are doing. Then they work with and support their school coordinating teachers in improving writing."

Evaluation

The district has not mandated a systemwide writing assessment because of the expense involved. "But if individual schools want to assess their needs," Ball said, "I go in and teach some holistic scoring and primary trait scoring."

Pre- and post-testing and holistic scoring is used, Ball noted, "when we want to see where we are and how much student writing improved during the year."

Ball encourages teachers to take an initial diagnostic piece of writing from each student, and to follow it with a prescriptive method of teaching. She cited an example of the effective use of diagnosis by recalling a visit to a junior high school class. In a conference with a student, she examined a paper with about 30 errors marked in red. She asked the student if the paper had discouraged him. In reply-

ing, he passed on what his teacher had told him: "I'm not discouraged because I made the same error over and over. I have run-on sentences, and all I have to do is to put periods, eliminate the 'ands,' and start new sentences with capital letters. Then the paper will be okay."

"This," Ball said, "is what we have been preaching to our teachers. If you analyze the errors in a paper, instead of 30 errors, there may be only five. You target which one is going to be easiest to correct and work through that error on each paper the student turns in. Then you start working on another error."

The district requires teachers of English in grades 7-12 to keep a separate manila folder for each student's writing. The folders serve three purposes: Ball uses them as one method of monitoring the writing program in each class, and the teachers use them to monitor the progress of students and as a resource for parent conferences on writing. Ball advises teachers not to pull out individual papers to send home to parents, but rather to have the parents attend a conference, at which time they can compare the student's writing at mid-year or the end of the year with his or her initial writing. "There is such a dramatic difference," she said, "that we have very few complaints after such a conference."

On the other hand, Ball said she and other

Reducing the Paperwork

Genie Ball, English specialist for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, N.C., cited several strategies used by teachers in her district to reduce the paperwork burden. Among them:

- Students use a proofreader's guide in English classes. It is attached to students' writing folders and used to catch as many errors as possible on a paper before submitting it to the teacher for grading. This reduces reading time for teachers.

- Students edit each other's papers in group editing and peer editing sessions.

- Some teachers tape-record comments to

individual students as they read student papers.

- Teachers may assign several papers in the same mode (e.g., a business letter, narrative, or expository writing) before asking students to submit one for a grade. Students choose their best paper and improve and edit it before turning it in.

- Ball stresses to teachers that they should not spend time marking errors on skills they have not taught. "Grade a paper for the two or three errors you are teaching students to correct and build from there. If you grade a total paper, it takes more time and inevitably you will miss something."

Checklist for Remedial Writing Programs

School districts should not shortchange or underestimate students who are steered into remedial writing programs because of problems in passing minimum competency tests.

One way not to shortchange them is to maintain high standards for remedial programs. Districts should check applicable re-

quirements under state law or regulations from the state education agency. In addition, the following checklist can give administrators some idea of the quality of their remedial programs. The checklist is adapted from a publication of the Bureau of English Education of the New York State Education Department.

Yes No

- ☐ ☐ The remedial program focuses on the objective of improving student writing, not only on the objective of helping students pass the minimum competency test.
- ☐ ☐ The program follows the general guidelines for all writing programs.
- ☐ ☐ The program is taught by certified English teachers (if at the secondary level) or by experienced and qualified teachers (if at the elementary level).
- ☐ ☐ A writing folder is kept for each student, containing samples of the student's work.
- ☐ ☐ Teachers use the work in the student's writing folder to diagnose his or her problems in writing.

Yes No

- ☐ ☐ Teachers indicate which strategies will be used for remediation, following individual diagnosis.
- ☐ ☐ Teachers assess the effectiveness of the strategies used with each student.
- ☐ ☐ The district provides inservice training in the teaching of writing for teachers working in remedial programs.
- ☐ ☐ Students participate in diagnosing their own writing problems.
- ☐ ☐ The program aims at making students responsible for correcting their writing, to the best of their ability, before they ask for help from the teacher.

administrators sometimes do get calls from parents who accuse a teacher of being illiterate. They may arrive with their child's papers in hand — papers that contain uncorrected errors. Some teachers get around the problem by using a rubber stamp on the top of a student's paper to indicate "this paper is being graded for _____." (The teacher fills in the blank with the appropriate phrase to describe what error is being noted.)

Some individual schools have sent letters to parents describing the writing program they are using and what parents can expect. But, Ball cautioned, teachers must feel confident and comfortable with what they are teaching before they are supportive of sending home such a letter. Otherwise teachers could feel that the letter gives parents a checklist

against which to measure the writing instruction their child is receiving.

Changing Attitudes

Ball said the most difficult job in implementing the district's writing program has been changing the attitudes of teachers and the community.

"They all remember suffering through grammar drill when they went to school, and they believe that is the way they learned to write. But as a practical matter," she said, "when parents or teachers want to write something, they don't sit down and think about adverbial conjunctions or prepositional phrases."

Ball noted the difficulty in getting across the

district's view of writing. "We are not saying that we want to ditch grammar; we are saying that we want to teach writing." But some teachers object, she explained, by maintaining that the only way they can teach writing is to give students all of the parts of speech first and to make sure students can master a grammatically correct sentence.

Ball uses several arguments with teachers. She tells them, for example, of her own painful experience in learning to write. An honors student in high school, she received a C- on her first paper in college. She finally struck upon a method that worked for her. She would ask a non-English major to read her paper after she had finished it and then tell her what it said. "It would take me maybe five times to rewrite it before someone could tell me what I had intended to say."

Gains made in changing attitudes sometimes suffer an unexpected setback. "What really does us in as far as teachers and parents are concerned," the English supervisor said, "is a story in the newspaper with a headline like, 'Illiteracy runs rampant in schools,' or a story about a person who applied for a job but could not write a grammatically correct letter of application." Such a story reinforces a teacher's attitude that "I've got to go back to teaching grammar," Ball noted. Parents are affected in a similar way. "They will remember that Johnny's last paper did not have subject-verb agreement marked, and they think they have to come in to see his teacher."

Difficulties

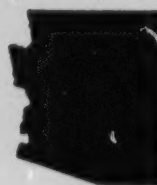
"We have seen dramatic effects in our writing program at both the elementary and secondary levels," Ball said. "The difficult level has been the junior highs, but that is where we have had the most curriculum and instructional turnover in the past three years." Teachers in grades 10-12, she emphasized, "have seen extraordinary progress in writing."

Another current problem is lack of a way for teachers to respond to requests from surrounding school districts for inservice training in writing. Under district rules, teachers can accumulate only five personal leave days, Ball explained. "We are in a real dilemma about releasing time for our teachers to go anywhere outside our schools to conduct workshops. We don't want to be viewed as uncooperative, but we need to work out a method statewide so we can help other districts."

Forecast

Participants in the summer inservice sessions

have included teachers in many different areas: social studies, math, science, and Title I. "By the end of this school year (1981-82)," Ball said, "I think everybody in the area of English will have been exposed to the writing process. By the end of two years, we will have an emphasis on writing across the curriculum. We will get the idea penetrating that writing is a skill, just as reading is a skill, that depends on the content areas for expression. When we have done that, we will probably have succeeded with our writing program."



Case Study: Mesa, Ariz.

Feature To Note:
Well stated guidelines for writing.

"In 1978, we were not evaluating students in writing, but we knew teachers were not prepared to teach writing and they were not stressing it in their classes."

These facts caused the 37,000-student Mesa (Ariz.) School District, located in suburban Phoenix, to set a goal of improving writing, according to Doug Barnard, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

"Once our superintendent, George Smith, told people what our goal was, it was easy to involve others because the expectancy was set," Barnard said. "The word filtered down to principals and teachers, and they then thought it was important," he added.

Barnard heard several presentations on the writing process sponsored by the Greater Phoenix Area Writing Project, an offshoot of the Bay Area Writing Project. He, in turn, recommended the training to a newly appointed writing coordinator, who was given responsibility for training all principals and teachers.

"We gave our coordinator lots of support," Barnard said, "because we realized she had a difficult job." The district required all elementary teachers and English teachers in the junior and senior high schools to attend an inservice session on writing. "If you are going to evaluate teachers on this area of teaching, you have to let them know what it is you

expect them to be able to do and to provide them some training," Barnard said.

All new teachers at any grade level are now required to attend an inservice session on the process of writing. It is given prior to the start of a new school year. In addition, the district offers additional training sessions throughout the year on various aspects of the writing process. These sessions have been well attended, Barnard said.

Philosophy of program. Administrators decided the district needed a written explanation of its philosophy and guidelines for the teaching of writing. The result, a 12-page document titled *Guidelines and Standards for Written Communications in the Mesa Public Schools*, is a model of simplicity and clarity.

A draft for the booklet, based on the findings of

current research, was put together by administrators. All elementary school personnel and English teachers in the junior and senior high schools were given a chance to review its contents. "We kept the items that were acceptable to at least 80 percent of the staff and tossed out the rest," Barnard said.

Here is the district's philosophy about writing, as stated in the booklet:

"The writing act can be defined as a process, and it should be taught as such. This process can be generalized, and therefore necessarily simplified, into three main stages: Prewriting, which is the discovery of topic and the determination of strategies in approaching that topic; composing, which is the actual transcription of thoughts into words; and evaluating, which includes the editing and publication of the piece of written communication. Each of

Mesa, Ariz., Schools Define Standard for Public Writing

The Mesa (Ariz.) Public Schools follow the philosophy that the primary standard of excellence in writing is that "it effectively conveys a meaningful message."

The district notes, however, that student writing intended for a public audience should be evaluated and edited according to the following standards:

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Handwriting is legible.2. Capitalization is accurate.3. Punctuation is appropriate.4. Complete sentences are used. | Primary | | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Each paragraph is indented.6. Good topic sentences are used.7. Details presented related to the topic.8. Paragraphs are organized in a logical sequence.9. Each paragraph makes one point.10. Parts of speech are used correctly.11. Words are spelled correctly.12. There is a good ending.13. The length of the assignment is appropriate. | | | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">14. Word choice is compatible with the standard level of English.15. In longer writing assignments, an opening paragraph introduces the topic.16. A concluding paragraph summarizes or emphasizes the topic of the writing assignment.17. A variety of sentence structure is used. | Intermediate | Secondary | |

these stages can be further delineated, but these internal components often occur simultaneously as well as sequentially. Not all pieces of writing go through the entire writing process. This is primarily determined by the audience and purpose decided upon in the prewriting stage.

"Functional writing tasks should be a part of all curriculum areas. Teachers of all subjects should utilize the writing process for writing activities.

Although the majority of writing skill instruction in the junior and senior highs will occur during English course work, all teachers should expect written assignment meant for a public audience (i.e., those that have proceeded through the entire writing process), to comply with the District Standard for Public Writing. [See box.]

All staff members are expected to assist in holistic scoring of student writing samples, which are col-

Publishing Student Writing

Almost any form of publishing writing can motivate students, their teachers, and their parents to pay more attention to writing.

Publishing does not have to occur in the traditional sense; rather, it can mean simply providing another audience outside the classroom that will read or hear what students write.

The superintendent, principals, teachers, parents — all can have a hand in making publishing possible. When parents, for example, want to know what they can do to help improve writing in the schools, an appropriate answer is "help us publish student writing."

In many schools, parents have volunteered their help in typing, duplicating, and putting together student writing. Teachers generally welcome the help, but administrators should allow each teacher to decide what kind of help he or she wants from parents.

Here are some of the ways schools are publishing student writing:

- School newspaper or literary magazines.
- Allowing students to read their writing over the public address system. Students can write the daily announcements or perhaps be given a chance to read original poems or other short pieces.
- Displaying student work in classrooms, trophy cases, the office of the principal or superintendent, reception areas, school bulletin boards located in areas with heavy traffic, e.g., the cafeteria; hallways.
- Having students put together a monthly newsletter for parents, e.g., activities, up-

coming actions, interviews with teachers and students.

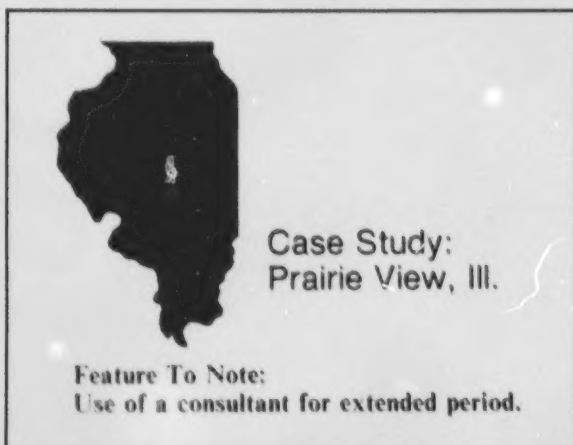
- Encouraging pen pals with students in another class, another school, another state, another country.
- Arranging for older students to read their writing to younger students.
- Asking a local newspaper for space on a regular basis to publish student writing.
- Inviting students who have done an exemplary piece of writing to read it to the principal or superintendent.
- Helping students put together a newspaper about themselves, with photos, cartoons, editorials, ads (offering themselves for sale or rent as friend, son, daughter, student, brother, sister, babysitter). Students can interview themselves and others about themselves. The idea can be adapted to the age of the students and the amount of time teachers are willing to devote to the project.
- Recognizing "student writer of the week."
- Encouraging and supporting teachers who want to put together a collection of student writing.
- Designating a "writing day" or "writing week"; publicizing it with parents and community; sponsoring activities and open houses for the public to view student writing.
- Encouraging students to try to have their writing published in statewide or national publications and to enter their work in writing contests.

lected twice a year (at the beginning and at the end of the school term). All students write on the same day on topics designated by the district. Two persons from each school are trained in holistic methods about a week before the samples are taken. These persons return to their schools and train other staff members on a day when students are released early.

"When we did the first testing," Barnard said, "the average score was 3 or 4 out of a possible 8. After the teachers were trained and started to teach the writing process to their students, the average score was 6 or 7." In addition, the assistant superintendent noted, "we started to hear from parents and school board members that they can see improvement in the kids' writing."

In 1981-82, the district was concentrating on training all staff members who had not previously been involved in the inservice sessions. "We want to get to the point where all staff members include writing in their subjects," Barnard said. "We recommend they do it now, but we do not require it."

Nevertheless, the administrator noted: "We've made a very dedicated commitment to improving writing, and we are having success."



Parents in the upper middle class community served by the Lincolnshire-Prairie View School District 103, Prairie View, Ill., show great concern that their children learn basic skills. Consequently, said Supt. Oscar Bedrosian in an interview for this report, the district has always placed strong emphasis on the three R's.

The district found out, nevertheless, that the parents were not satisfied with grammar and legibility in their children's writing. Many of the parents work in professional fields, and they see in their

work the need for good writing, Bedrosian explained.

Under the superintendent's leadership, the district revised its language arts document. As a result, Bedrosian said, students showed an average gain of 35 percent in language arts skills within two years of the curriculum revision.

The parents were still not satisfied, as indicated by an annual parent evaluation of basic education programs. In the 1979 survey, 69.5 percent of the parents rated the language arts program as excellent or very good, compared with a 79 percent rating for mathematics. In 1981 a slightly higher percentage of parents rated the math program as excellent or very good, but fewer parents (68.6 percent) than two years earlier gave high ratings to language arts.

"We have an excellent staff," the superintendent said, "but we realized we needed some outside help." The board authorized Bedrosian to do whatever was necessary to improve language arts in the district.

After contacting several major universities for help, he hired Robert A. Gundlach, director of writing programs at Northwestern University, as a consultant. Gundlach received a three-year contract. This was not an unusual procedure, Bedrosian explained, because the district does not have full-time curriculum coordinators. Instead, when the need arises, a specialist is hired to work with district staff.

In retrospect, the superintendent noted, "Bob got us over the hump on our writing program." In the first year of his contract, Gundlach worked with staff members in determining what they were doing about writing and what needed to be done. He found that most staff members were not confident about their own writing or the teaching of writing, they did not know how to evaluate student writing, and they were apprehensive about explaining to parents how the language arts were being taught.

The district offered to pay the tuition of any teachers and administrators who would volunteer to take part in inservice training in writing. It also offered teachers credit on the salary schedule upon satisfactory completion of the course.

Twenty-eight persons, mostly teachers but including several principals, enrolled for the after-school course, which consisted of 16 two-hour sessions. The course stressed how to teach and evaluate writing and how to discuss it with parents.

Among the enrollees were teachers of English, special education, math, and science. "We will offer the course again next year," Bedrosian said, "because we are hoping that at least 75 percent of our

people will be trained in how to teach writing.

"Our approach has been low-key, and attendance at the sessions has been very good," the superintendent noted. He did not enroll for the course, but, he said, "I attended about one-half of the sessions."

Because of the interest of parents, Bedrosian offered them an informal course on the writing process, consisting of six sessions of 2½ hours each. Approximately 250 parents participated. Gundlach explored with them the topics they were interested in: how writing is learned, what the school curriculum does to support students as they learn to write,

how parents can evaluate what their children are learning, what spelling errors mean. Gundlach also keeps the Board of Education apprised of the district program.

Where is the district headed? The superintendent talked of plans to publish anthologies of writing by both students and teachers. More staff members will be trained in additional writing courses. And those staff members who are not yet involved in the district program, he noted, will probably become interested based solely on what they see happening to their peers and the students.

Composition Content
Punctuation Thinking
Characterization Form
Order Coherence
Grammar Descriptive
Structure Narrative
Spelling Dialog Style

Writing in Elementary Schools

What do we know about the teaching of writing in grades 1-8?

Shirley Haley-James of Georgia State University, Atlanta, pursued the answer to that question as chairperson of the Committee on Teaching Written Composition in Elementary Schools for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

Haley-James reviewed all the professional literature on the subject published in the United States between 1900 and 1980. She came up with 11 observations that numerous authorities agree with:

- ✓ Children learn to write by writing.
- ✓ Even very young school-age children whose knowledge of letter formations and spelling patterns is limited can and should write.
- ✓ Writing frequently on self-selected topics is important in developing skill in writing.
- ✓ When children feel a need or a desire to write for some purpose or audience, they write more effectively.
- ✓ Children should write from their experiences, and expectations for their writing should be in line with their stage of experiential and mental development.
- ✓ Oral language processing of the ideas and content being expressed should precede writing and occur during writing.
- ✓ Real and varied audiences for their work are important to the development of children as writers and to their incentive to write.
- ✓ Writing purpose and a developing concept of audience lead children to a logical need for revising selected pieces of their writing.

✓ Formal study of grammar should be delayed until grade eight or nine.

✓ Teacher and peer conferences with the writer are appropriate means of helping children process their writing orally and progress from first drafts, in which primary concern is with getting meaning out on paper, to improved drafts.

✓ Holistic and primary trait scoring are useful means of assessing both the progress of groups of children and the effectiveness of writing programs.

Note: More information about Haley-James's findings is contained in *Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8*, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Ill. 61801; \$5.50.

Start in Kindergarten

If you are going to start a writing program, is it better to concentrate on the elementary schools or the secondary schools? Most school districts appear to do a little of each. Some, however, focus exclusively on the elementary schools, others on secondary schools, mainly in English classes.

Paul Eschholz, director of the Vermont Writing Program, has had a chance to work closely with both elementary and secondary schools and teachers at both levels. He started training teachers at the secondary level, as specified in a grant he received from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Then he received a second grant to work with elementary schools.

Eschholz is now convinced that it is easier to work from the bottom up, rather than from the top down, in a writing program.

"If I had to do it all over again, and if the funding had been available, I would have started working in

the kindergarten and first grade, rather than at the high school level.

"Teachers in the elementary grades seem to be student centered and willing to work with writing. They have the children in class all day and are therefore better able to work writing into their schedule each day. Somewhere in grades 7-9, the teachers start to become teacher oriented or discipline oriented and generally less willing to work with writing."

Eschholz believes the change takes place at the middle school or junior high school level. If the district has K-6 elementary schools, for example, the change takes place in grade 7.

"What we are finding," he added, "is that when classrooms are self-contained, it's easier to branch out and get writing into the content areas than when a school has a 'departmentalized' structure.

"When schools become departmentalized, you run into the notion of 'coverage.' The teachers feel they have too much material to cover to give attention to writing.

"In the schools where there is one teacher at grades 6, 7, and 8, the teacher can cover the material and get writing into the curriculum. It is when you start busting up programs into disciplines and moving students from room to room that you erect barriers to the teaching of writing."

What's the solution? Eschholz believes that writing — especially writing across the curriculum — should be emphasized at the elementary grades and allowed to "filter on up," rather than starting at the secondary and college level and trying to break down the discipline barriers that have been put up.

This may be the back-door approach to getting students to write in all subject areas, but it appears likely that it could work. If students learn to write well at the elementary level, they will, in effect, force teachers at upper grade levels to emphasize writing. The goal would be to get students to see writing not as another subject but as a means of learning about many things.

Eschholz, along with other consultants, administrators, and teachers interviewed for this report, cited examples of the workability of this back-door approach. In one elementary school, for example, students wrote every day under the tutelage of a teacher who believed in writing. In the following year, the students started to ask their new teacher why they were not writing anymore. She was put in the position of going to the students' former teacher and asking: "What did you do with writing last year? The kids are asking to write." Some persons interviewed for this report said this type of "grass-roots

inservice" may be the most effective kind for long-range, lasting change in a school.

Writing Process Described

The 3,700-student Owen J. Roberts School District, Pottstown, Pa., revised its entire language arts curriculum starting in 1979 at the high school level. A revised curriculum for the middle schools was put in place in 1980 and for the elementary schools in 1981.

All major curriculum changes were based on the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the existing program, research, and empirical data, said Ronald E. Davies, supervisor of secondary curriculum and instruction. The district received help in the revision process from educational auditors and curriculum specialists as well as from the Pennsylvania Writing Project.

Following is the district's statement of philosophy about the "guided writing process" in use in its K-5 schools.

Owen J. Roberts School District Guided Writing Process Grades K-5

Students learn to write by writing. They should be taught to realize that good writing is not just a happenstance but that it occurs when the writer takes the time and makes the effort to develop his ideas using an organized, systematic approach to the task. This approach is called "The Writing Process." Working with the process, the students cycle among the stages of prewriting, drafting, refining, and editing. The stages are flexible and allow the student to develop an idea, write it down, and gather more information (if he needs it) before continuing his writing. The student cycles through prewriting and drafting, drafting and refining until the content is developed to the writer's satisfaction.

In the writing process, the teacher focuses on the writer's development of ideas rather than on the forms of the completed written pieces. The teacher observes, encourages, questions, and makes suggestions through the process.

Techniques to improve skills and content can be taught by the teacher during conferencing. Students should be taught skills as the need arises. Conferences also provide time for the writer, as he writes,

to discuss ideas and to receive suggestions as he needs them to improve his writing. When conferencing, the teacher will sometimes work with individuals, sometimes with small groups, and at other times with the whole class. A writing conference can range from an encouraging word to a 15-minute group conference about a shared problem.

Students at all grade levels must learn to work with others in conferencing groups to develop editing, questioning, and listening skills. Modeling is a good way to initiate group and peer conferencing. This provides the opportunity for students to have a guided practice as the teacher points out good questioning techniques and responses.

Each student should have a folder for his working drafts. When he has been taught a skill and shown mastery in subsequent writings, the teacher should list the skill on the front of the writing folder. From then on, the student is responsible for its correct usage in his written work.

Correct spelling can be a problem for any student, especially beginning writers in kindergarten and first grade. By using 'invented' spelling, students write their words using the letters of the alphabet that they have learned. In initial attempts at writing, students will first represent a word using only the letter that stands for the first sound in the word. Then they add another letter for the ending sound. Finally, still relying on the sounds of their own speech, they fill in the middle letters.

Older students will often rely on their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships to write words which they do not know how to spell. Using 'invented' spelling, students have a wide choice of words from their speaking vocabulary to use in their writing. If a student has to stop to check words in a dictionary or ask for the correct spelling, the flow of ideas can be interrupted.

For students in grades 2-5, the responsibility for correct spelling occurs when the content is refined to the writer's satisfaction. When proofreading, those students should circle those words which they feel might be misspelled. The teacher and the student should choose 5 to 10 of those words which closely approximate the correct spelling. The student should then determine the correct spelling using a dictionary, a friend, or other means available to him.

The advantages of teaching the writing process extend beyond the primary goal of producing improved writers. It can be used to improve students' writing in any content area — from writing reports to writing letters. Through the writing process, students become better writers, learn to work with

their peers, to listen carefully, to respond constructively, and to review their work — skills and attitudes which can carry over positively to all subject areas and to informal writing as well.



Case Study: Vermont Writing Program

Features To Note:

Six model schools.
Emphasis on conferencing.
Involvement of administrators.

Educators all over the country who want to improve their writing programs may soon be beating a trail to Vermont. There they can visit six elementary schools with model writing programs, established with the help of two English professors, Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa, co-directors of the Vermont Writing Program (VWP).

The program was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1977 to set up a statewide model of teacher inservice training in writing. It is the only statewide model of its kind in the country. Funding for the project — approximately \$600,000 — covered five and one-half years' work.

Eschholz and Rosa have deliberately "kept a low profile" and have not sought publicity for their work. Instead, Eschholz said in an interview for this report, they have spent their time in training Vermont teachers and administrators to teach writing and then helping them in their own classrooms during the school year.

The project actually went through two phases before getting to the point of establishing models. The first two-year grant from NEH was used to establish an inservice training program for high school teachers. "We focused on two things: to make the teachers write themselves and, from that experience, to make them understand what the writing process is all about," Eschholz said.

In summer training sessions of four weeks, the teachers spent the mornings in writing, the afternoons in learning to apply the writing process to their work with students in the classroom.

The content of the training sessions reflects the basic philosophy of the VWP:

1. People learn to write by writing (not by doing exercises in workbooks, grammar drills, and spelling lessons).
2. Writing *can be* taught, and it is best taught as a *process* and not as a product.
3. Conferences are an indispensable part of teaching writing because they enable writers to discuss their writing while they are in the process of writing it.
4. The responsibility for the success or failure of a writer belongs ultimately with the writer, not the teacher.
5. In order to teach writing, teachers must write regularly themselves.

Eschholz believes that teachers should start teaching writing in the classroom by building on a pupil's areas of knowledge or expertise. Armed with the necessary information (content), students can produce writing which is narrative, descriptive, expository, or argumentative.

Eschholz advises teachers that frequent short pieces, with the same work revised in successive drafts, are far more profitable for the student and relieve the teacher of tedious correction of long themes nightly or weekly.

The Vermont professor believes that teachers should know what to do and to expect when they return to their classrooms to try what they have learned. Consequently, in afternoon training sessions, teachers break into groups by grade level, for example, K-2, 3-4, 5-6. "When we talk about the application of writing principles in a classroom setting, we try to give the teachers some expectations of what their students will be doing at various points in the school year. In other words, what kinds of things can teachers expect first graders to do? Will they be writing on the first day of class or will they be drawing? When can the teachers expect to see letters . . . 'invented spelling' . . . sequences of sentences . . . a story?" In all sessions for all teachers, the inservice instructors emphasize the importance of giving students an opportunity to write on a daily basis.

"We seemed to have a more monolithic approach than the Bay Area Writing Project (see description in Chapter VIII) in that we taught all teachers and administrators in the exact same philosophical approach," the Vermont professor said. The instructors initially were college teachers. Later, the proj-

ect started to rely on elementary and secondary teachers who had gone through the initial training successfully and qualified as teaching "fellows."

Demands for the training sessions grew as teachers returned to their districts and started to use what they had learned. In the first summer, Eschholz recalled, the program had room for 100 teachers, but only 83 applied. All were accepted.

In 1979 the project was refunded by NEH to allow the two professors to shift their focus to elementary schools. They continued their format of providing inservice training for teachers, but some important things happened. Eschholz explained: "We ran for two years without the involvement of administrators. When they finally got involved, it marked a real turning point in the whole project." Administrators had been invited to attend training sessions earlier, but, Eschholz said, "no one bit."

Administrators became interested in the program for two reasons: word-of-mouth advertising by the classroom teachers who had gone through the inservice training and the effects of the project starting to show up in classrooms.

"Once the administrators started to come to the inservice programs," the Vermont professor recalled, "we did not have enough spots to accommodate them." The first time the project offered administrators a course in the process of writing, 67 applied for 40 openings. The second time around, 90 administrators applied for the 40 spots.

Similarly, by the fourth year of the project, 600 teachers applied for 100 openings in the tuition-free program. At the end of five years, more than 600 teachers and 85 administrators (including 15 superintendents) had participated in the training. In terms of the number of schools affected, the project had worked with teachers in 80 percent of the state's high schools and 55 to 60 percent of the elementary schools.

"We have found so much interest," Eschholz said, "that school districts have not had to offer stipends for teachers to attend our inservice sessions in the summer or evening classes." The teachers who were not accepted into the open program paid \$200 to attend the course.

VWP has an informal network for the educators who have received training. They are invited back to the university for additional training and for meetings, and all receive a newsletter.

As the final test of the writing program, Eschholz and Rosa asked for applications from elementary schools interested in establishing a model program, which would be open for visitation. Only elementary schools could apply because of the terms of the

NEH grant. Further, 75 percent of the teachers and administrators in a school making application had to agree to take part in a summer inservice training course. That stipulation reflects the two professors' belief that administrators as well as teachers should receive training in the process of writing and that,

by taking the course together, faculty members build commitment to a common cause of making the program work.

Eighteen schools applied for the six spots. Those chosen reflect as wide a variety of settings as the state allows. Included are schools in a somewhat

Turning Out Good Writers — Without Teaching

That headline is a come-on of sorts. But it may be a way to attract teachers — and administrators — to a new approach to writing advocated by Eschholz and Rosa and others around the country. The approach stresses the importance of frequent writing for students; conferencing with students while they are in the process of writing, drafting, revising, editing; and making students themselves responsible for their writing. Here's part of an interview with Eschholz on the role of the teacher:

"A teacher does not have to do much teaching, in the traditional sense of the word, in order to turn out good writers. The teachers are trained to be listeners instead of lecturers, to be coaches instead of judges. In the third grade, for example, the child comes up to you with a paper he has written. You go through it with the child, listening to what he has to say about it, not marking errors in the paper or telling the child what has to be corrected.

"Very often the teacher might have the student read the paper aloud. You would be surprised how many times the child will start erasing and changing the paper in the very process of reading it to you. Then, instead of telling the student what to do, the teacher will start asking questions: 'What are you trying to say in your paper?' 'Do you think your paper has said it?' 'What do you like best about your paper?' 'Where do you need help?'

"What the teachers are doing is putting the responsibility for the paper squarely on the shoulders of the student, whether that student is in first grade or twelfth grade.

"Where the direct teaching does occur is at the end of the process, when the student is editing the piece of writing and getting it ready for publication. It is at this point that the teacher, in looking at the paper, must deter-

mine what are the spelling, grammatical, and punctuation skills that this student must have. Then she teaches these skills individually as she goes through the final draft with each student.

"This means you are getting rid of workbooks and drills done by the whole class. You are teaching on an individual basis during the editing stage of each piece of writing.

"We are finding that the research is correct: there is no carryover to the student's writing of grammatical skills taught in a group. A teacher might spend a whole day, for example, in teaching students how to use the comma in a compound sentence, and the next day, in writing compound sentences, students will write them without the comma. Students have much greater retention of the skill when it is learned in the context of their own writing.

"Occasionally, group work is called for. Say a teacher has a whole group of students who want to work with dialogue. These students can be drawn together as a group and taught how to use and punctuate dialogue.

"With this kind of individual approach, teachers initially thought they would need extra aides in the classroom. But as soon as they get into the swing of things, they find it is relatively easy to manage because the students are taking responsibility for their own writing, and they are able to conference with one another.

"Because students are writing all of the time, they are never sitting around with nothing to do. They continue writing or conferencing with a peer while waiting their turn to talk with the teacher. So, while handling the students on an individual basis appears to be a problem initially, in practice it turns out to be no problem at all."

urban area, a "professional, suburban" area, a bedroom community, a resort area, and rural farm areas. The schools are: Central School in South Burlington, Middlebury I.D. #4, Milton Elementary School, Stowe Elementary School, Westford Elementary School, and Tunbridge Central School.

When staff members got back to their schools after the training for the 1981-82 term, they found they had the assistance not only of their principals but also of Eschholz and Rosa. Along with VWP researchers Glenda Bissex and Iris Estabrook, the two professors set up a routine of being in the schools daily, helping the teachers and principals in whatever way they could to make the program run smoothly.

"We have been so intent in working with the schools and in making sure things go right that we have not had time to write much about the project as yet," Eschholz noted.

But that will change. With the ending of the grant, both professors will be on leave and are scheduled to start writing up their findings in the summer of 1982.

Eschholz talked about some of these findings:

- **Student writing.** "Given the opportunity and sufficient time to write, kids from kindergarten on up can really surprise us."

- **Minimum competency requirements.** Teachers and students are seeing (the state's) minimum competencies for what they really are — *minimum* competencies. "Most of the students are sailing right through them with no problem at all."

- **Parent interest.** Eschholz and Rosa were invited to attend meetings of parent groups in the model schools. In each case, attendance at the meetings was usually about triple regular attendance. The reason: "Parents told us they had to see what it was that was making their children so excited about school. The kids were coming home talking about writing and talking about school in a way parents had never heard before, and they wanted to know why." Eschholz concluded: "This program gets parents excited."

- **Student achievement.** The emphasis of the project from the beginning has been teacher training. But it has been impossible not to notice what the students are doing, Eschholz noted. Writing folders are maintained for each student in the six schools so that their writing can be carefully studied at the conclusion of the school year.

In several schools where only one or two teachers

"When teachers have not been exposed to a good writing program, teacher expectations of what students can do is very low, and teachers themselves believe that writing cannot be taught."

—Paul Eschholz
Director
Vermont Writing Program

have participated in the program and are teaching writing as advocated by the program, however, the scores attained on standardized tests by the students of the trained teachers "have stood out dramatically" from those of other students, Eschholz said.

- **Time spent in writing.** Students in the model schools write an average of 45 to 90 minutes daily. Most of the teachers started out by having a "writing period." Now, Eschholz said, "we are working with teachers in all areas of the curriculum so that the students in math classes, for example, write their own word problems. When this happens, the teachers spend a little extra time in the subject area, with less time used for the writing period. The teachers are also beginning to use writing in science and social sciences."

- **Principal's role.** In the six schools, the principal is playing a supporting role to teachers, Eschholz said. They do the ordinary things such as order supplies needed by the teachers, but the teachers also invite their principal into classrooms to help in conferences with students. "The principals don't have to be police officers or disciplinarians; they now work as partners with their teachers."

Eschholz believes other schools should be able to duplicate the program established in the six model schools — even without having him or Rosa as facilitators. The inservice training sessions at the university are now available for administrators and teachers during both summer school and evening division on a tuition basis.

And the two professors will be putting together publications to describe what they have learned. They also expect to have some time available to work with school districts which are strongly committed to writing.

In addition, Eschholz noted, "we are working on timetables for teachers that describe when things

should happen in the classroom." According to their findings, for example, the first six or seven weeks of a writing program is when most teachers want to give up. "Things are not happening; the teachers get discouraged, the kids are frustrated.

"It is in the seventh, eighth, and ninth weeks that everything starts to happen." Eschholz used the analogy of a popcorn popper to explain this phenomenon: "In September, you have 30 kernels of corn (students) sitting at the bottom of the popper. The oil starts to get hot, but nothing happens. Then the first kernel pops. This is the 'breakthrough': everything starts to pop after that. By the holidays, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, you have a classroom where a tremendous amount of writing is going on."

A word on costs: Eschholz could quote no ballpark figures on how much it would cost for a school or a district to adopt the type of program he advocates. The main costs, he noted, would be a three- to five-year investment in inservice training

and released time for teachers.

"The nice thing," he said, "is that you don't have to hire anyone new. You are really training all of your classroom teachers to become writing teachers, so you don't have to take on special staff."

There are also tremendous savings, he added, in textbooks and consumable items (workbooks, drill sheets). The more teachers come to rely on writing, the more they ask only for little journals, pencil and paper, so the district is saving money.

"In terms of a three- to five-year program," he concluded, "some of the costs are balanced by the savings. The cost is not large, especially when you consider the importance of writing and the fact that a writing program affects the entire student body."

For more information, contact Paul Eschholz or Alfred Rosa at the Vermont Writing Program, Department of English, 315 Old Mill, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt. 05405.

Superintendent Sets Good Example for His District

When a superintendent takes a writing course, the words get around.

That is what Supt. Fred Tuttle of the South Burlington (Vt.) School District found when he decided in the summer of 1978 to demonstrate his personal commitment to writing by taking a one-week writing course for administrators offered by the Vermont Writing Program.

Tuttle believes that writing is one of the most important skills that students can learn in school. Besides, he said in an interview for this report, "it is one thing to hear someone explain the process of writing, but quite different — much more enlightening — to go through it yourself."

When word got around that he had taken the

training, it served as an incentive for teachers in the district to enroll for training. Principals in the five-school, 2,400-student district also have been trained. "This gave us a basis for sitting down and discussing what we needed to do in writing," the superintendent said.

Now Tuttle demonstrates his support by visiting classes, taking a personal interest in student writing, keeping the school board informed of progress, and continuing to emphasize writing with principals and teachers.

The superintendent said he gained personally with regard to his own writing as a result of taking the training, and, if he ever went back into the classroom, he would spend more time teaching writing.

Punctuation Thinking
Characterization Form
Ordering Coherence
Grammar Descriptive
Structure Narrative
Spelling Dialog Style
Syntactic Interpretive

Writing in Secondary Schools

Many of those who were interviewed for this report stressed the difficulty of trying to establish a writing program at the secondary level on a schoolwide or districtwide basis.

One consultant who works with districts in providing inservice training in writing said, "Often there is so little writing going on that you can't even find the first sign of an organized program." But Paul Eschholz, director of the Vermont Writing Program, said he has seen enough successes in the high schools of Vermont to be assured that the situation is not hopeless. But, he noted, he has also seen enough backsliding to realize that it is going to take "a lot of patience and persistence" to improve writing programs in secondary schools. Others cited examples of entire schools in which a dedicated staff is working hard to improve both the teaching and learning of writing. In addition, there is no doubt in the minds of many administrators that the mere existence of minimum competency or proficiency standards has caused staff and students to seriously pursue more and better writing.

How Much Do Students Write?

Two recent reports discuss writing instruction in the nation's high schools. The first report portrays what was going on in 1979-80 in some of the nation's "better" writing programs. The second report, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, bases its conclusions on the responses of students enrolled in all kinds of high schools in all parts of the country.

A Look at 'Better' Writing Programs

Arthur N. Applebee, associate professor of the School of Education at Stanford University, and his associates observed teachers in two Midwestern

high schools over a full academic year, interviewed 41 students and eight high school teachers, and analyzed responses from 754 "good" English teachers (nominated by their high school principals). The study, supported with funds from the National Institute of Education, was conducted between late 1979 and mid 1980.

Here are some of the findings:

- **Time spent on writing:** Writing activities occupied an average of 44 percent of class time in all subjects observed. Most of the time, however, was spent on "mechanical" writing, e.g., fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, math calculations, copying, dictation, note taking.
- **Time spent on longer writing:** Only 3 percent of lesson time was devoted to writing that required students to produce at least a paragraph of coherent text.
- **Homework assignments:** Of 118 assignments observed by the researchers, only 3 percent asked for writing of at least a paragraph in length. The remainder was divided equally between read-and-study assignments and mechanical uses of writing.
- **Teacher report vs. actual practice:** When teachers reported their classes were "full of writing," what actually took place, the researchers noted, was writing one-sentence answers to study questions.
- **Length of writing assignments:** The typical writing assignment required a page or less of copy, reported the teachers who answered the survey.
- **Pre-writing activities:** Just over three minutes, on the average, were spent on prewriting activities.

ties in the classes observed. For the most part, teachers gave instructions on form (e.g., length, neatness, and layout), but rarely gave instructions as to appropriate content.

- **Helping students:** Activities to help students while they were writing were almost nonexistent in the classes observed.
- **Requiring more than one draft:** Only about 30 percent of the teachers answering the survey said they regularly required students to rewrite. The English teachers were more likely to make that requirement (59 percent said they do so), and science teachers least likely (7 percent).
- **Post-writing activities:** Students received little follow-up to their written work. Only 21 percent of the teachers replying to the survey reported regular use of conferences with individual students at grade 11. Even English teachers found time for such conferences in fewer than 25 percent of their classes.

NAEP Findings

A second glimpse of the writing practices in the nation's schools comes from the reports of 13- and 17-year-olds who participated in the 1978-79 assessment of writing conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. NAEP asked students the questions below (which appear here in abbreviated form).

These findings, along with the results of an attitude survey of the two groups of students, led NAEP to conclude:

"Neither 13- nor 17-year-olds receive a great deal of direct instruction in writing or are required to do much writing in school. Very few appear to have access to a writing program that includes prewriting instruction, oral and written feedback on written assignments, encouragement to write several drafts of papers, and opportunities to reword papers after they have been reviewed by teachers.

"A considerable proportion of young people about to leave high school, moreover, consider themselves

Questions	Responses		Questions	Responses	
	Students age 13	Students age 17		Students age 13	Students age 17
Reports written in past 6 weeks as part of any school assignment?	percent		Draft/rewrite before turning in paper?		
None	16.4	13.9	Usually	40.6	56.3
1	16.4	12.3	Sometimes	45.5	35.9
2-4	38.6	41.9	Never	13.9	7.8
5-10	17.2	22.5	Teacher suggestions on paper?		
More than 10	11.4	5.3	Usually	26.3	48.0
Time spent in English class on writing instruction?			Sometimes	56.1	44.2
None or small amount of time	44.0	37.3	Never	17.5	7.7
1/3 of class time	31.4	37.1	Teacher discusses paper?		
1/2 of class time	23.6	24.3	Usually	31.2	27.0
Pre-writing encouraged: notes or outlines or both required?			Sometimes	52.6	57.1
Yes	52.0	66.0	Never	16.2	15.8
No	48.0	34.0	Asked to improve returned paper?		
			Usually	13.7	13.4
			Sometimes	50.5	46.2
			Never	35.7	40.3

poor writers, are apprehensive about writing, or are uncertain about their level of skill."

How Composition Is Taught

Depending on where students go to high school, they may or may not have to take a course in composition. The survey for this report asked, for example:

"Is composition treated as a separate course for students in grades 9-12?"

The response: 33 percent answered yes; 67 percent, no.

Some districts gave a yes/no answer; that is, composition is treated as a separate course for some grades or to meet the specific need of some students, but it is not taught as a separate course for all grades.

Composition, when taught along with other subjects, may be combined with English or language arts, with grammar and/or literature, or in combination with reading, social studies, or "other subject areas."

The survey also revealed great variety in the number and timing of required composition courses. One district, for example, may require students to take 4 one-quarter courses in composition in their high school career (grades 9-12), while another district may require students to take one year-long course in composition in grade 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Electives: Fifty-five percent of responding districts said they offer advanced composition courses as electives in grades 9-12; 26 percent said they do not. Another 19 percent said the question was not applicable because they serve only elementary students, or they did not respond.

How To Gauge Effectiveness

Secondary school principals can get a quick rough estimate of the effectiveness of their school writing program by looking for five "danger signals," according to Prof. Applebee of Stanford University. The danger signals, along with Applebee's comments, follow:

 **Danger Signal #1:**
Low or falling scores
on writing tests.

Comment: The most important scores to consider are those based on actual writing samples. A school

that does not have a direct measure of writing achievement available can get some information from tests of related skills, e.g., usage, vocabulary, editing skills, and verbal ability scores from standardized achievement tests, college entrance examinations, or competency tests.

The danger in relying on such scores, Applebee warned, is that this practice can lead to inappropriate changes in the curriculum. Focusing on usage exercises, for example, will raise test scores on usage, but will not improve writing achievement. He also noted that principals must be wary on judging a writing program on the basis of student performance on mandated competency exams because they generally require only minimal skills.

 **Danger Signal #2:**
Widespread use of
objective tests.

Comment: "Though easy to grade, such tests tell students indirectly that being able to write about what they have learned is not important. Examinations requiring writing can be a strong motivation for mastery of writing skills."

 **Danger Signal #3:**
Omission of writing
from assessments.

Comment: If the school routinely assesses student achievement through standardized testing or competency examinations, writing skills should be among the areas assessed. Such assessment should be based on samples of student writing, not on indirect measures. The results of writing assessments should be included with other achievement measures as part of each student's cumulative record.

 **Danger Signal #4:**
No help for students
with problems.

Comment: A school should pay attention to students who need help with their writing, whether it is

in the form of special education teachers, remedial tutoring, special classes, or reduced class size for lowest achievers. Applebee cautioned against the use of reading teachers who have not been adequately trained to handle writing problems.



Danger Signal #5: Complaints about achievement.

Comment: "Whether or not achievement levels have dropped, if students or teachers are concerned about 'the writing problem,' your school is in a position to implement a more effective program," Applebee said.

Establishing a Writing Program

The Bureau of English Education of the New York State Education Department offers these suggestions for establishing a writing program in the secondary schools:

1. Teachers in the secondary schools should be aware of the writing program in the elementary schools. There should be frequent contact, particularly between the teachers of grades 6 and 7, or 5 and 6, to discuss ways of developing writing skills, to exchange sets of papers, to analyze writing problems of individual pupils.
2. The writing program should seek to enhance the skills of all students.
3. Every possible occasion should be used to get students to write, and to vary the purposes and audiences for which they write. Not every piece of writing, however, has to be corrected and graded.
4. Teachers must be aware that having students do grammar and usage exercises, or to write out answers to questions at the end of the chapter, is not the same thing as teaching students how to write.
5. Teachers should be aware of the objectives of the entire writing program, not just the segments which they teach.
6. Time must be given to teaching writing, with provision for all stages of the writing process. This most likely means omitting some part of the present curriculum.
7. Support must be given in many ways to teachers of writing, including reasonable class sizes and total pupil load, inservice training, and leadership from administrators and coordinators.

8. Teachers in all disciplines should be aware of the goal of improving student writing. They should require writing of "standard quality" wherever applicable in their disciplines.

9. A folder of compositions should be kept for each student. The folder can be used as the basis for discussion with a student of his or her progress, for discussion with parents, administrators, and school board members, and as a means of evaluating the student's progress as well as that of the writing program.

Improving Teaching

Applebee offers these suggestions to principals who want to improve the teaching of writing in their schools:

1. Mobilize interest in improving writing instruction.

Comment: The support of the entire staff is needed; simply revising the curriculum will not do. Start with a small group of teachers, from the English Department and other curriculum areas, who are interested in studying the problem.

2. Conduct a simple assessment of the quantity of student writing.

Comment: One way to do this is to ask a small number of cooperative students to save all the written work (including class notes, exercises, drafts, worksheets) they do for school in a one- or two-week period. You may come up with the following findings: Students are writing very little; those who need the most help are getting the least practice; there will be little evidence of progression in writing tasks from grade to grade or of consistency from teacher to teacher. The findings could form the basis for staff discussion of what needs to be done.

3. Encourage a schoolwide emphasis on writing.

Comment: This will happen only if teachers in disciplines other than English can be made to realize that they are not "taking time from their 'real' work to teach writing; rather, that they are enriching their own teaching by using writing for their own purposes."

4. Resist efforts to solve the writing problem with a remedial writing class.

Comment: "It is easy to respond to writing problems with a 'problem class,'" Applebee noted. Effective writing instruction, he added, should be fully integrated into the English curriculum of all students, not separated out as a special class for students with problems. "By focusing your attention on the overall writing program, rather than only on

eradicating errors or providing remedial instruction, you can help your instructional staff maintain a similar balance and perspective."

5. Provide students with a place to go when they have problems.

Comment: Some of the most important "safety nets," in Applebee's opinion, are writing centers that are available to all students, not just to those who are failing. If students of all levels of writing ability are encouraged to come for help when they need it, he said, some of the stigma of being in a "remedial class" is removed from those students who may be most in need of help.

6. Reward good writing.

Comment: Teachers can encourage students to write well by giving them opportunities to share their writing with school and outside audiences, by

publications and contests, and by bringing writers, editors, poets, and others into the schools. This practice can show students that writing is valued in the adult world and can also give students a chance to work with these people.

7. Insure a place for writing when your school adopts new instructional technologies.

Comment: Don't limit new technology to technical subjects such as science and math. Microcomputers, for example, could be used for a variety of games and exercises to help students improve particular mechanical writing skills. Machines with word processing and text editing options could be used with students who are learning about the writing process.

"For the weaker student," Applebee advised, "the novelty of working on the computer can be an

Florida Legislature Pays Districts To Lower Class Size

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has maintained for 20 years that teachers in secondary schools should be required to teach no more than four classes of 25 students and that teachers of elementary language arts classes should be responsible for no more than 25 pupils per day.

Most school districts say they don't have the money to make the recommendation a reality. But in Florida, the recommendation reached a power base — State Senator Jack Gordon. He introduced legislation to make state funds available to any district in Florida that wanted to increase the amount of writing done by students, without increasing the workload of teachers.

Florida districts did not get a blank check, however. Gordon attached ~~some~~ strings to the money, which totaled \$6 million and became available in July 1981. The legislation specified:

- Districts could use the extra money only to reduce class size for language arts classes. The number of students in a class could not exceed 25, and the class load for a language arts teacher could not exceed 100.
- The money had to be used for either junior

or senior high school classes. If a district requires three years of English, the money had to be used to reduce class size in the junior year. If a district requires four years of English, class size would have to be lowered in the senior year. Districts, moreover, were required to serve all students in all of its schools at the designated grade level, not just students who need remedial help.

- Each student in the designated grade level must produce at least one writing "product" per week.

Although districts had only one month in which to apply for the state money in time for the 1981-82 school year, 53 of Florida's 67 districts participated in the program, according to a spokesman for the Florida State Department of Education. Some districts hired new language arts teachers; others simply shifted assignments and changed class schedules.

The blitz of student papers expected to be produced in participating districts — 2.9 million in one year, according to one estimate — will be eligible for entry in sub-regional, regional, and statewide competitions for student writing.

important motivating device. For academically oriented students, the ability to work with machines may soon be as much of a 'survival skill' as personal typewriting."

8. Capitalize on community concern about writing.

Comment: "When parents are concerned, they will be more interested in finding out what constitutes a good program and what 'good' writing involves."

9. Support inservice work on the teaching of writing.

Comment: While teachers may be interested in improving instruction in writing, they may simply not know how best to go about it. Applebee's suggestion: "You may have to insist that your staff draw upon outside help in reformulating the writing program; otherwise, the solutions they come up with may simply be larger doses of old and familiar approaches."

How To Gauge Progress

Applebee, along with superintendents and principals interviewed for this report, made one point clear: Improving writing is a slow process; there's no quick cure.

But, he noted, principals will be able to tell when improvement is under way. Here are some of the signs to watch for:

- Writing should be more in evidence in all subject areas. Teachers, for example, will be talking with their classes about how to gather information for a writing assignment; students will be writing; completed writing will be evident in a variety of places, from bulletin boards to dittoed samples.

- The pass rates on writing examinations should stabilize and then rise.

- Essay items should be in greater evidence in school examinations.

- Students who need help with their writing should have a clearly established way to get that help.

- The comments of students, teachers, and parents should reflect the change.

Tips for Secondary Teachers

Kim Davis, director of Subject A (remedial English) at the University of California at Berkeley, has a challenging job: to rescue freshman students who cannot write well enough, in the university's opinion, to survive in college. (Approximately one-third of incoming freshmen have to take the course.)

Davis said about 85 percent of the enrollees pass the course in one semester. Why the high rate of success in such a short period of time? Here are some of the reasons: Students must pay for the course; they must pass it to continue with their education; the teachers of the course have many fewer students than most high school teachers; and, perhaps most importantly, the teachers know what they want from the students and how to get it.

Davis offered these eight suggestions for high school teachers who want to obtain results similar to those obtained by the Subject A instructors:

1. Make students more conversant with writing exposition, starting with reading of more exposition.
2. Be consistent in responding to student writing; develop "compassionate firmness" for holding students accountable.
3. Refuse to read student writing that has been hastily produced. "This does not have to be done in a dictatorial manner, but in a compassionate manner."
4. Work toward developing a total school assessment program. This is the best way, Davis believes, for English teachers to apprise their colleagues of the burden they bear. By getting all teachers together to read student papers in a writing assessment, inconsistency in marking can be reduced. Teachers, moreover, may realize the necessity of agreeing to schoolwide or districtwide standards for good writing and of requiring more writing in their classes.
5. Teach students to develop self-diagnosis skills. Have them critique their papers to determine "the best single sentence you wrote in this essay," "the most difficult thing you encountered." Give them a chance to take pride in a good sentence or phrase.
6. Have students keep a journal of the writing they have done in a course, including what is good, what is bad, signs of progress.
7. Tell students they don't have to "gussy up" their writing.
8. Work to make students feel comfortable in writing class.

Model Program;

Model Description

The English program at Phillips Exeter Academy "has had remarkable success in helping high school age students learn to write well," according to Norval Rindfleisch, assistant director of the Exeter Writing Project.

Rindfleisch described the program in an issue of

Letter to Parents

Teacher Sue Thomas decided to "go on the offensive" — for once — by clearly stating what she expected from students in her ninth grade English classes. She handed out a letter to students, who took it home and had their parents sign it. Students received credit for

bringing it back with a parent's signature.

Thomas said it "scared" the students and gained written and vocal support from parents.

The letter appears here in shortened form. Thomas teaches at Valley High School in the Elk Grove (Calif.) Unified School District.

Dear Parent,

Your son (or daughter) will be a student in my English classroom this year, and I wanted to give you some idea of what will be going on during that 50-minute period. I have high expectations for me and for my students, but there is one other person who is absolutely critical to our success--you. I guarantee that your son (or daughter) will be working hard and learning, but I can only assign work outside the classroom and hope for the best. No amount of pleading or threatening on my part will have an effect without your support at home to reinforce what we are trying to accomplish.

I cannot stress too much the importance of writing. Writing is thinking, and we will be working all year to get ideas on paper in a logical, thoughtful, interesting way. Students will be keeping daily journals and doing timed writings to build power, speed and fluidity. They will be writing letters and filling in job applications and other forms to develop practical skills. They will evaluate what they read to develop comprehension, and they will work on sentences and paragraph development. In the context of their reading and writing, they will learn grammar and vocabulary and the conventions of the English language, such as spelling, punctuation and capitalization. They will write for themselves, for me, for others in the classroom, for the school newspaper and, possibly, for other outside audiences. Mostly, they will write and then write some more and, when they cry for mercy, I'll say, "Don't tell be about it. Write about it." I only get one or two death threats a year.

The other critical part of any English curriculum is reading, and read we will. We will be exploring an anthology and reading two or three novels together. I also expect students to read a minimum of three books on their own each quarter for a "C" grade, four for a "B" and six for an "A."

I insist that students come on time and be prepared to work. We have a clearly defined tardy policy, and I will enforce it strictly. Any student who disrupts the classroom or refuses to work will be removed until I can meet with him (or her) and a parent. Assignments must be turned in on the assigned deadline, or, in the case of excused absences, on the day the student returns. If the student cannot complete a major assignment on time, I expect that student to call me at home the night before and give me a valid reason or at least a highly creative excuse.

I look forward to teaching your son (or daughter) this year. Please call me if you have any questions or problems.

Sincerely,

Sue Thomas
Valley High School English Department

the newsletter for the National Writing Project. To implement such a program, according to Rindfleisch, the teacher load should be held under 60 students — generally an unrealized dream in public schools today.

Yet, the description of the program may be helpful to secondary schools and their administrators. James Gray, director of the Bay Area Writing Project, called the description a model for all school districts. Why? Because it incorporates the view of all faculty members about the teaching of writing. This is an important first step, according to Gray, for any district interested in improving the teaching of writing.

The description appears here in abbreviated form:

"The members of the Phillips Exeter Academy English department believe in writing with a certain mystical awe.

"Writing has emerged as the center of the English curriculum as the logical consequence of a personal seminar system of learning. In any school where teacher loads can be held under 60 students, conditions are ideal for a writing program to flourish; to do less, to fail to center a curriculum in writing with 13 students in a class, is to betray the essential needs of developing adolescents.

"Writing is composing, and composing is a decision making process of great complexity even on the simplest level. It is more than grammar or spelling or punctuation. It is above all a process of thinking, feeling, ordering, organizing. It entails an inner sense of revision, a mysterious power in all students that continues to amaze teachers of writing who permit and encourage it to operate. Writing is also a process of discovery, a mode of knowing. Students often find out what they really know by being forced to write; ideally they do not understand any content until they have written it. It is then, after a first draft, after the writer discovers what he really wants to say, that the shaping toward form and correctness begins.

"The writing program is grounded in several general principles, some similar to those that underlie the developmental reading sequence. We expect diversity and graduated complexity in the writing produced by our students. . . .

"They write from a variety of perspectives to a variety of audiences as they explore the voices that emerge within and as they begin to sense the importance of the expanding world beyond home and family. In each course we try to achieve a balance between the teacher's insistence that the student write about new ideas, using different tech-

niques, and the student's right to explore his own subject matter and discover his own voice, perspective, or structure. Even when a student is directed to experiment with a technique, the content is his.

"There are three stages of emphasis for a four-year student. Experiential writing dominates the first three semesters. Students write about the world around them — the given world of family, friends, school — in several modes such as narratives, descriptions, interior and dramatic monologues, and dialogue. Though students are asked to write frequently — especially in class — about the reading, the majority of papers are derived from personal experience so that the students can develop self-confidence as authors. Each student becomes an expert, writing as a professional to the teacher and fellow students rather than as a hesitant amateur, as often occurs when students are required to write exclusively about a narrow range of literary topics they neither fully understand nor care about for a teacher who has studied the material for several years in college and graduate school.

"During the middle semesters, the emphasis is placed upon moving the student from participant-writer to observer-writer, from self-awareness to audience awareness. It is during these semesters that the student learns the role of the writer as mediator, arbiter, and guide. We encourage students to fictionalize more objectively, to use 'I' as a device of fiction rather than simply as an expression of self. Students experiment with different voices. They are required to reach beyond personal experience and explore or investigate other people's worlds and interests.

"We require the students . . . to write papers in which the skills of explanation and analysis are balanced with skills of narration, description, and characterization. The reporter-at-large, the family heritage paper, multiple perspective fiction, intelligence or reconnaissance reports, college entrance essays, third person self-evaluations, and policy statements or editorials are all representative assignments during the tenth and eleventh grades.

"In the latter half of the eleventh grade and throughout the senior year, the emphasis shifts to the intellectual. Students write longer analytical and interpretive papers. In fiction, we expect students to handle anonymous narration and more complex narrative time schemes. We also focus upon maturity of style, but the earlier skills are not abandoned. Students still write personal narratives and poetry. Sensitivity to detail, perception, and convincing dialogue are still important. . . .

"We deter the intellectual emphasis for two

principal reasons. Beginning writers develop a surer sense of who they are as authors by writing initially about personal experience. Secondly, after several semesters of reading and classroom discussions of literature, the students develop greater self-confidence as well as an appropriate vocabulary to handle more abstract and intellectualized papers. Sophisticated cognitive skills seem to develop later than experiential skills with most students.

"Through the sequence just described, we attempt to integrate the reading and the writing. Students are assigned to write a paper using a specific technique (an I-witness point-of-view or the present tense, for example) after the class discussion of its use in a novel or short story. More often than not, the free papers are inspired by a book or a class discussion.

"Writing is better when students read works similar in theme or form to what they are expected to write. The story of Bigger Thomas becomes a moving, vicarious experience for most of our students. They are better informed; their sense of fairness and social justice is deepened. They become more profoundly human, and they become better writers.

"Perhaps reading is our most effective teacher of writing. Generations of great writers have testified that their own development was influenced by writers they admired. Reading books does not interfere with the development of a natural or personal voice. We do not use literature as models to be slavishly imitated. We might use fiction to inspire a poem; an essay might produce a short story, a novel, a play. Any form can evoke a critical or reflective essay. If anything interferes with the growth of young people as writers, it is an environment devoid of the written word — the worlds of television and careless oral language.

"In teaching writing we believe in the basics. . . . By basics we do not mean drill in grammar with canned sentences in exercise workbooks or the memorization of grammatical nomenclature. We have not instituted remedial writing courses labeled 'competence,' for we well know that competence is an issue in every paper.

"Syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical competence in the tenth grade can be syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical failure in the twelfth grade. Because writing is perhaps the most complex of all human activities, making errors goes with the territory. Errors gradually disappear only over a long period of constant and frequent correction.

"Many of the following basic practices and attitudes that permit our students to become writers are logical extensions of seminar teaching. Most have been validated by recent research.

"1. Students learn to write by writing, frequently, in various modes, and to a variety of audiences. The teacher may use supplemental aids such as diagnostic grammar tests, grammar texts, workbooks, vocabulary sheets, or sentence combining exercises — but not to the extent that any of these aids becomes a substitute for student writing.

"2. Students are encouraged to write about their own experience. They choose to write about books, their feelings, relatives, special interests, political passions, and what they may have done last summer, which in this permissive age is one of the most interesting papers teachers read.

"3. Grammar and style are taught most effectively by noting errors in the student's own writing and by requiring the student to correct the errors. Examples of writing problems are often selected from a set of student papers, duplicated, and passed out to the class for collective consideration. Stylistically we encourage students to write economically and concretely. It is an axiom of our writing program not to teach the student what he already knows as revealed by what he is writing correctly.

"4. Evaluations of student papers should be positive as well as negative, promptly returned, and open to student counter-response and eventual dialogue. Students should see noted errors as opportunities for improvement rather than as justification of a grade. Covering a paper with red marks is not always productive.

"5. Students read their papers aloud in class for feedback and encouragement. The teacher should not be the sole audience for student writing. Conferences between the student and the teacher are expected, often while the student is searching for a topic, writing a paper, or doing a revision. Writing is rewriting also. The teacher's advice is most useful while the student is making decisions rather than after.

"6. Teachers of writing should practice writing and be willing to write along with their students or to share first drafts of their own compositions with students."

Note: For a fuller description of the program, see the February 1981 issue of *Independent Schools*.

Descriptive Editorials
Analytical Historical
Persuasive
Comparative
Diversity Complexity
Vocabulary Semantic
Interpretive Monolog

Inservice Training

The survey for this report asked respondents to describe any inservice education programs in writing that their districts offered teachers and to list any tips on inservice that would be helpful to other districts.

About 50 percent of the respondents said their districts had recently sponsored some type of inservice training in writing. They listed workshops with topics as extensive as a full-blown explanation of the writing process or as limited as the teaching of a specific type of writing (e.g., creative writing) or the use of a specific technique (e.g., sentence combining).

Many survey respondents recommended training offered by one of the projects affiliated with the Bay Area Writing Project, or by the Individualized Language Arts program, which is located in Weehawken, N.J. Few other programs were mentioned by name by survey respondents.

Several respondents, in fact, cautioned their colleagues not to look for an offbeat program or to spend too much time devising their own approach without investigating what is already available.

"Use a recognized, accepted program. You don't have to reinvent the wheel," advised Supt. Robert T. Fox of the Hanover (Mass.) Public Schools. "Train a few members of your staff and use them to train others," he added. "This makes the program more acceptable and follow-up occurs naturally."

Similarly, a spokesman for the San Mateo (Calif.) Union High School District recommended: "Go with a program that has a good track record unless your problems are really unique."

Another generally accepted bit of wisdom about inservice training in writing is that it cannot be a "one-shot, one-day" thing. Such sessions are considered a waste of time, energy, and money, and they often result in giving staff members a false view of how writing should be taught.

The type and extensiveness of the inservice training depend on a number of factors, including the approach to writing to be used (e.g., will teachers learn to use and to teach all steps of the writing process?); whether the participants will be required to implement the program or the process in the classroom or to supervise or evaluate it; and what kinds of formal and informal training will be available in the future.

The various offshoots of the Bay Area Writing Project, for example, generally provide 10 inservice training sessions in a year's time to districts interested in improving their writing programs. Districts often repeat the sessions in subsequent years, and may offer more advanced training to teachers requesting it.

Consultants from Individualized Language Arts (ILA), the other popular writing program mentioned by survey respondents, offer two days of initial training in the use of their instructional methods.

The methods are described in detail in a manual which may be purchased at a low price.

Districts implementing ILA have the option of asking the consultants to return some months after the initial training for follow-up with teachers who have tried the methods.

The Trainer: Key to Success

The people who provide the inservice training are the key to its success, according to many respondents to the survey for this report. Who should the trainer(s) be? Districts are divided on the answer to that question. Most districts reported the use of a combination of insiders and outsiders, including college or university personnel, district staff, state education agencies, textbook companies, intermedi-

ate units or regional educational agencies, or personnel from other school districts.

How effective is inservice training provided by a colleague? That depends on the view of teachers in your district. Generally, if the teachers in a school or a district get along well and operate as a team, they will welcome help from one of their members. However, one English teacher from a California high school who was interviewed for this report vetoed the idea of using peers. "Use teachers from out of town," she advised. Her explanation: "Some teachers do not react favorably to inservice conducted by one of their peers. They will say things like this: 'Why do I have to sit and listen to her? I can hear her sounding off around here all the time.'"

A spokesman for the Fremont Union High School District, Sunnyvale, Calif., offered different advice. He said: "Use the best writing teachers on your staff to conduct inservice training for the others. It works."

Districts that describe their writing program as "effective" often use a combination of insiders and outsiders to train their staffs in writing.

One example: Supt. Roland M. Miller of Lenox, Mass., said his district needed the advice of outside people several times as it put together its writing program. "Don Graves was helpful to us because he was able to bring his knowledge of research in writing, and he was able to get our staff 'pumped up' about the program."

Also "extremely helpful" to Miller's district, he said, were classroom teachers from other systems who had begun to implement a writing program successfully in their own schools. "We brought them into the system as consultants for a day here and a day there," said the Massachusetts superintendent. "They would work with the classroom teachers. They did some fishbowl lessons in front of the class, visited classrooms where teachers were teaching, and did some critiquing of lessons."

"We found out, however, that even though our staff was excited about the program, it was a little unnerving for them to have a consultant go into their classrooms to observe and critique them," Miller said.

"The main benefit we received from these consultants," Miller noted, "was when they sat down with the teachers in a workshop session and talked with them about things the teachers had tried to do and where they ran into problems."

Note: Teachers — whether from inside or outside the district — have more credibility as instructors of inservice training sessions than non-teaching "experts," judging by the comments of respondents to

the survey for this report. In addition to classroom experience, the top qualities for inservice instructors, in the view of respondents, are enthusiasm, knowledge of current theory on the writing process, and stress on practical application of techniques.

Option: Hire a Consultant

An option used by several of the districts featured in case studies in this report is to hire a consultant for a specified period of time, e.g., one or more years.

The consultant's duties may include planning, needs assessment, follow-up in classrooms, and the preparation of reports for staff, board members, and the community, in addition to providing inservice training.

One district that uses a consultant is the Lincolnshire-Prairie View School District, Prairie View, Ill. Supt. Oscar Bedrosian offers three suggestions on the hiring of a writing consultant:

- Hire someone who is an expert and respected in the field of writing.
- Hire someone who doesn't have a know-it-all attitude because "this will turn off the staff."
- Hire someone who has a low-key approach. ("Teachers and administrators are apprehensive about their writing and about their ability to teach, explain, or evaluate writing; therefore, they prefer someone who is low-key.")

Another view on the qualifications of a writing consultant came from Supt. James A. Burns of the Indian River County School District, Vero Beach, Fla. He advised that a consultant should be able to draw on practical experience in the classroom, be able to motivate teachers to motivate students and be a person who can say to teachers, "this works."

Voluntary or Forced?

Most respondents said the inservice sessions in their districts were offered to teachers on a voluntary basis. Judging by the responses, districts are more likely to require attendance if the subject is new curriculum guidelines or state competency or proficiency requirements in writing.

One district administrator advised: "The only successful way to offer inservice is on a voluntary basis, or, if you do so on an involuntary basis, require attendance of only those staff members who would volunteer anyway."

"In starting a writing program, you have to realize you are not going to get all the teachers to come in," advised Joseph Leheny, assistant superin-

tendent in Ridgefield, Conn. "If you force them, you lose more than you gain." In Leheny's view, the better way is to depend on "invisible peer pressure" to bring in the stragglers.

Another reason to follow the voluntary route is simply this: Teachers who are forced to attend inservice sessions against their will can be "down-right rude," according to many consultants who conduct inservice training in school districts. Involuntary participants, moreover, decrease the effectiveness of the sessions for the other, more willing participants.

Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire and Paul Eschholz of the University of Vermont both agreed in separate interviews for this report that some teachers are just not going to become teachers of writing, and the wise course for administrators is "to wait them out," rather than pressuring them to attend inservice training or to teach writing.

"Otherwise," Eschholz said, "it's like working with a mule: the harder you pull, the more stubborn he will get." Such teachers, he said, sometimes turn around, even though it may take five years. One reason it may take that long, he explained, is that these teachers are so insecure about their own writing.

This approach is suggested by Supt. Roland M. Miller of the Lenox (Mass.) Public Schools.

"Initially in the development of a writing program," he said, "I think you should go with people who are interested, who have the commitment, who have the expertise or are willing to develop it. But," Miller added, "you arrive at a point where you have to decide to implement the program districtwide. The pitch to the staff should then be: 'We are going to do this. We have an obligation to train you, and you have an obligation to get trained.'" That is the point at which a voluntary program should become mandatory, Miller said.

The Massachusetts superintendent conceded, however, that a mandate does not always work because "you will have some people whose commitment is perhaps not what it should be."

Released Time, Other Incentives

Teachers prefer to attend inservice sessions on writing during released time from the regular school day. Interviews and case studies for this report indicate, however, that school districts may or may not be able to provide that released time. Nevertheless, numerous school districts attract teachers to

Tips on Offering Successful Inservice Training

Administrators and teachers offered these tips on how to conduct inservice workshops:

- ✓ Make teachers aware of the theory and recent research into the teaching of writing.
- ✓ Focus the workshop on practical application of theory and research in writing instruction.
- ✓ Involve the teachers in doing whatever is suggested. Let them become students — writers — themselves.
- ✓ Give teachers time and opportunity to gain confidence in their ability to teach composition.
- ✓ Avoid a grab bag of gimmicks.
- ✓ Address the issues that concern teachers, such as paperwork, evaluation, diagnosis, remediation, and explaining the writing program to parents.
- ✓ Provide school time for teachers to plan how they will apply what they have learned.
- ✓ Involve administrators in the inservice training.

inservice sessions after school or on weekends if no other alternative is available.

Some districts offer credit on the salary schedule for satisfactory completion of inservice training, while others consider retraining a professional responsibility of teachers — one that should not require payment.

Finally, many districts willingly pay tuition for teachers to attend any of the various types of inservice training sessions offered, for example, by branches of the Bay Area Writing Project. Some districts pay tuition only for teachers who are accepted into the five-week summer institutes, and they expect other teachers to pay their own way for evening, summer, or after-school courses.

Some respondents to the survey for this report suggested that both released time and credit for salary increases, as well as tuition reimbursement, be used as incentives for attendance at inservice sessions. "Make attendance voluntary, but pay teachers a stipend for participating," suggested

Harold Litucker, superintendent of the Cato-Meridian Central School District, Cato, N.Y. "If the district doesn't think inservice is important enough to pay for it, the teachers won't think it is important enough to participate," he said.

Similar advice came from Jackson B. Frost, administrative assistant of the Tahoma School District, Maple Valley, Wash.: "Enlist the teachers from the beginning and support inservice with funds, credit, or whatever support can be generated."

Some New Ideas

As a follow-up to inservice training, some of the writing projects around the country have recorded on videotape various aspects of the writing process, e.g., a demonstration of pre-writing activities, a student editing group, or a writing conference between teacher and student. The videotapes are intended for use with (1) teachers who have not been exposed to inservice training in writing, (2) teachers who have been trained but who need a refresher course or "second look" at a particular technique, (3) parents who are interested in the writing program.

Another idea that can make inservice training particularly effective is follow-up with teachers in

their classrooms by the person responsible for the inservice or another person who is thoroughly familiar with the writing process. This idea seems to work because teachers are more apt to know the right kinds of questions to ask and the additional assistance they need after they have had a chance to try out newly learned methods of teaching writing.

Robert Weiss of the Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester, a spinoff of the Bay Area Writing Project, said teachers may request an additional inservice session following a series of workshops on writing "to tie it all together" or to clarify how the various techniques they have heard about fit into a comprehensive approach to teaching writing.

Bay Area Writing Project

The Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) — the nation's best known and most extensive inservice education effort to improve the teaching of writing — was launched at the Berkeley campus of the University of California in 1973, at least a year before the press proclaimed the existence of a "writing crisis" in the schools.

From the start, the project was a collaborative effort between the university and the public schools

Using Released Time and Other Options

Districts intent on improving their writing programs over an extensive period of time need to be aware of all possible options for holding inservice training sessions for teachers. Teachers prefer that the training sessions be held on regular time and that substitutes be provided to teach their classes. But districts cannot always afford to pay substitutes.

Some options are available. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, N.C., for example, offers inservice sessions on Saturdays, after school, or during the summer, in addition to providing released time for some inservice training sessions.

Other districts offer these suggestions:

- Look to the state or foundations for adoption grants to pay for released time.

- Ask teachers to donate a day of their own time (e.g., Saturday) for each day or two on which the district provides substitutes. This idea goes over better with teachers if additional incentives such as recognition and inservice credit are part of the agreement.
- In training large numbers of teachers, it may be possible to break them into morning and afternoon groups. One substitute can be hired to cover the classes of two teachers.
- Put students on a minimum day.
- Ask teachers to team-teach temporarily so their classes can be combined on inservice training days.
- Use counselors, administrators, aides, or parents to help cover classes, where feasible.

of the San Francisco Bay Area.

The timing was perfect. When the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published an important story on the status of writing in U.S. schools, the reporter looked around for indications of what was being done about the crisis. The search yielded the Bay Area Writing Project.

BAWP's impact has spread to 85 officially sanctioned offshoots in colleges and universities nationwide, 17 of them in California and 68 in 40 other states. In addition, there is one site in Canada and one within the Department of Defense Dependents School System. Another 10 sites were scheduled to be in operation by the end of 1982.

James Gray, one of the original founders of BAWP and still its guiding force, maintained from the project's earliest days that student writing was weak because no one had been paying any attention to writing, most teachers at all levels lacked training and know-how to teach writing, and the results of research and of effective teaching practices in writing were not being transmitted to the vast majority of the nation's teachers.

The only way to cause massive change in student writing, Gray decided, was to work directly with classroom teachers. They needed access to the knowledge of successful teachers of writing and current research in writing.

Gray strongly believes that teachers who teach writing, not outside experts, make the best trainers of other teachers. Consequently, the founders of BAWP decided to bring together the best writing teachers in the Bay Area schools and to have them teach and learn from each other. This idea evolved into BAWP's summer writing institutes, still the heart of the project both at the Berkeley campus and at other BAWP sites around the country.

Teachers apply for 25 openings each summer for the five-week institute. Gray bases his selection of participants on their experience in teaching writing and their prospects for taking on the role of an instructor of other teachers. The selected teachers are called fellows. They receive stipends from BAWP to cover expenses, and they may apply for college credit. The best of the fellows will become teacher/consultants, who will be assigned by BAWP to provide training in writing in its various programs and in inservice workshops requested by school districts.

The summer institute and other BAWP activities are described in *Improving Writing in California Schools* (California State Department of Education, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, Calif. 95814; 1982; \$2.00). Much of the information that follows

is taken from that report.

The summer institutes meet four days a week for five weeks. During morning sessions, fellows individually demonstrate methods of teaching writing that they have used successfully in their classrooms. Each speaker explains the theoretical assumptions behind the method demonstrated and describes the skills it is designed to teach. Frequently, he or she distributes personally developed instructional materials and examples of student work. Often, too, the speaker asks the participants to assume the role of students and to do the writing assignments the method requires. Presentations by the fellows are supplemented by those of guest speakers — nationally known authorities on the teaching of writing who explain significant research findings or describe approaches not covered by the fellows.

The institutes promote no single philosophy or methodology. Instead, teachers are presented with a cross section of theories and approaches they can weigh and debate. Within this flexible framework, however, BAWP has evolved a core of topics its staff considers important to successful writing instruction:

- *The composing process*: prewriting activities through revision.
- *Syntax*: rhetoric developed by Francis Christensen, sentence combining, examination of common errors.
- *Sequence*: from personal writing to analytical writing, forming the thesis, patterns of reasoning, sources of content.
- *Small-group techniques*: peer criticism, writing to real audiences within the classroom, reading aloud in small groups.
- *Writing assessment*: holistic and cloze reading techniques, schoolwide assessment.

Two new activities were added starting with the 1981 institute. One afternoon session is devoted to the examination of selected, key readings in the process of writing, writing across the curriculum, writing about ideas, writing in the elementary grades, and writing for the basic student. On another day, the teachers join study groups focused upon a common interest. The study groups continue after the close of the summer institute and are expanded to include teachers from past summer institutes.

BAWP institutes deliberately mix teachers from all grade levels, kindergarten through graduate school. Through their discussions, participants discover that the writing process is the same at all

Teachers Tell Why Students Can't Write

How would teachers answer this question: Why don't students write better than they do?

Billie Thompson, coordinator of the Tempe (Ariz.) Area Career and Curriculum Development Program, put that question to a group of teachers before and after they participated in inservice training in writing sponsored by the Arizona Writing Project, an offshoot of the Bay Area Writing Project.

Prior to their participation in the project, Thompson reported, the teachers blamed student inability to write on:

- Spending too much time watching television.
- A decline in the use of writing in society.
- Social despair, dislocation, broken families, loss of faith in the future.
- Overcrowded classes, insufficient resources for teaching.
- Lack of confidence in the schools, lack of parental support.

After taking part in the project, teachers

dramatically shifted their attention to these factors:

- Students need more guidance during the writing process.
- Teachers need to know more about what demands have been made on students before, and what they will be asked to do after their year with them.
- Students' need for practice in writing without grades or criticism to gain fluency and confidence, and to use writing to discover ideas.
- Students' need for guided practice in revising.
- Students' need of responses from more and different audiences.
- Teachers' need to have realistic and higher expectations for their students.
- Teachers' need to develop writing assignments carefully, with a clearer idea of what they expect students to do and to learn.

levels; no sequence requires students to learn to write a sentence at one grade level, a paragraph at another, and an essay even later. Instead, students at all grade levels can work on complete pieces of writing, with the teacher focusing on the process of writing at whatever level of complexity the student is able to understand.

Teachers Write, Write, and Write

The most revolutionary — and in some respects the most important — aspect of the institute is the volume of writing done by the participants. During the first four weeks, the fellows are asked to write about a subject that interests them from three points of view, ranging from the personal to the analytical. Papers are duplicated and distributed to small writing response groups, where each is read aloud by the writer and discussed thoroughly.

During the final week, the teachers write personal position papers describing their philosophies about writing in light of the new information and insights they have received.

At first, many of the teachers find writing for

colleagues to be a frightening experience. Many have written little besides personal letters and lesson plans since graduating from college. The personal writing, however, breaks down barriers, and writing becomes the highlight of the summer experience for many.

Besides helping weld the group together, the extensive writing, though exhausting, gives participants a sense of what students go through when they write. "Those of us who experienced that first summer program at Berkeley came away convinced that English teachers who want to teach writing must themselves write," said Mary Lee Glass, an English teacher at Gunn High School in Palo Alto. "Only when we have practiced writing along with reading about it — when we have agonized over the process as well as theorized about it — can we have the patience, persistence, and on-the-job inspiration to understand and use approaches that others have worked out. And only then can we begin to comprehend what it is like to be a kid faced with a blank piece of paper."

The writing response groups, which meet afternoons throughout the summer institute, provide a

model for future small-group work in the classroom. Students, like teachers, are more apt to discover errors when reading their papers aloud than they are when proofreading silently. Also, students are more likely to remember rules for writing mechanics when they point out errors in one another's writing.

District Inservice Training

After the first summer institute, key school administrators recommended by the summer fellows were invited to a dinner meeting at the university. The administrators were urged to use the talents of the teacher/consultants, i.e., the fellows, in inservice training programs at the school or district level. The range of consulting services provided by BAWP also was explained.

Any inservice training coordinated by BAWP is planned cooperatively by project and district personnel; cooperative planning ensures that the training will be directed toward local needs and that the district will be committed to its success. The district also makes a financial commitment to cover the cost of the teacher/consultants.

The inservice programs are flexible and take various forms, depending on the desires and needs of the district. The typical year-long program involves 10 three-hour sessions conducted every other week by teacher/consultants trained in the summer institutes and coordinated by the BAWP staff. A full range of specific approaches to teaching composition is introduced. Because each session is long, the teachers have time to write as if they were the students who eventually receive the instruction. Other possible programs include after-school or Saturday workshops, English department presentations, and schoolwide across-the-curriculum workshops. In some programs, participants write out-of-class assignments that are read and revised in small writing response groups.

Year-long BAWP inservice programs for school districts usually include presentations on many of the following topics:

- Organization of the writing class.
- How to grade, edit, and correct student papers.
- The use of writing folders.
- Theory and research on the writing process.
- Teaching writing in all subjects.
- Writing to a variety of audiences.
- Sentence combining.
- Teaching the reluctant or remedial writer.
- Using small writing response groups.
- Evaluating writing programs.

Not every school receives BAWP's new concepts and techniques warmly. In a district where only one

teacher has been involved in the project, isolation can be a real problem. When a class lesson eagerly prepared by the teacher fails miserably, no one is nearby to analyze and commiserate. Even in the best of situations, there is a danger that the teacher's ideas will grow stale without the crucial element of follow-up.

For these reasons, BAWP sponsors many activities that keep institute graduates in touch with each other and with new developments. As local inservice programs begin to take shape, the teacher/consultants attend planning meetings to coordinate and compare presentations. BAWP also hosts monthly three-hour Saturday meetings for all teacher/consultants throughout the year. At some meetings the teachers write; at others they hear new presentations or guest speakers.

BAWP Offers Other Programs

The invitational summer institutes and the inservice workshops generated so much interest from teachers that, by the spring of 1976, BAWP was deluged with inquiries from teachers wishing to participate in its activities. To meet this demand, the BAWP staff started a new course that summer, open to anyone who wishes to enroll. Participants, unlike those in the institute, receive no stipend from BAWP.

This course, dubbed the "open program," has since been offered each summer at the Berkeley campus. The course is coordinated and taught by a team of BAWP teacher/consultants. Enrollment ranges between 70 and 100 teachers from all grade levels. They include not only English teachers but also teachers of social studies, mathematics, home-making, physical education, and many other disciplines, plus school administrators.

Participants in the open program read about and discuss the teaching of writing; hear presentations by the instructors, by teacher/consultants from past summer institutes, and by guest speakers; and meet in small groups to discuss special areas of interest or how to apply methods at specific grade levels.

Like teachers in the invitational institute, open program participants write pieces ranging from personal experiences to fiction, poetry, essays, and, finally, a statement of personal philosophy about the teaching of writing. Their writing is duplicated and discussed in small groups.

BAWP also takes part in other teacher education efforts. One of these is the Subject A training program. Subject A is the University of California's basic writing course for all students who score below 600 on the English achievement section of the

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and who fail an additional essay examination.

Each year, the university invites feeder high schools to send advanced composition teachers to a two-week summer training program conducted by the university's Subject A staff. In this program, similar to one for new instructors of Subject A, teachers study the Subject A methodology, examine diagnostic essays, visit Subject A classes, write Subject A essays themselves, and discuss problems and concerns with the Subject A staff.

The purpose of the program is to pass on to high school teachers the techniques that the Subject A staff uses to prepare students for college writing in 10 weeks. The ultimate goal is to reduce the number of entering freshmen who cannot meet the university's writing requirements.

After the summer session, the Subject A staff visit the teachers' schools to encourage the teachers and to discuss the university's writing requirements with college-bound students.

To help make sure that new teachers leave college adequately trained to teach writing, BAWP also is involved in the University of California's Preservice Credential Program, a program for English and related majors who plan to teach in intermediate and secondary schools.

Expansion in California

The expansion of the BAWP concept to the entire state of California began in 1975 with the formation

of a state advisory committee on student writing. The committee recommended that the State Department of Education identify outstanding teachers of composition and outstanding composition programs. It also recommended that the department, in cooperation with local school districts, colleges, universities, and county offices of education, promote inservice training in the teaching of writing by making use of these exemplary teachers and programs.

BAWP became the model for the state program. The state education agency sponsored meetings to bring together educators in various geographic areas of the state in an effort to design writing projects for each area.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funded additional sites in California. Collectively, these sites are known as the California Writing Project (CWP). In addition, the state granted funds under Title IV-C of the (federal) Elementary and Secondary Education Act to California districts that wanted to contract with BAWP and CWP for inservice training sessions.

Expansion Across the U.S.

NEH funds were also used to establish BAWP projects in other states. They are described by BAWP as the National Writing Project (NWP). To receive a grant, new NWP sites must come up with matching funds from sponsoring universities and

BAWP-Trained Teachers Can Be Effective Change Agents

One of the ideas implicit in the Bay Area Writing Project and its offshoots around the country is that even a single teacher, once trained in BAWP techniques, can be an effective change agent in his or her own school or district.

But this does not always happen immediately, said Marion Mohr of the Northern Virginia Writing Project.

Nevertheless, the change agent strategy can work in the long run. How? Colleagues of the trained teacher, Mohr said, may notice that

the teacher is happier, is getting students to write more, and is taking more interest in his or her classes. The colleagues may ask: "What's happened to you?" or "Why are the kids more interested in your classes all of a sudden?"

This gives the trained teacher an opportunity to promote BAWP inservice training, Mohr explained, and it results in grass roots support for inservice. Thus, "even an isolated teacher can be a very effective change agent," Mohr concluded.

participating local school districts. The projects are expected to build a success record that will ensure continuing support from local sources.

BAWP screens the applications for new sites, provides matching funds and gifts, conducts planning meetings at Berkeley, and sends BAWP teacher/consultants to assist at the first summer institute of the new writing project. The various projects stay in touch with each other via a national newsletter and visits and meetings.

Some of the sites offer a variety of training programs in writing. They may include, for example, graduate course work on teaching writing, writing workshops for university personnel, or direct classroom support during the school year.

Results

What happens to teachers and the way they teach after they participate in BAWP-type training? Here are some types of changes that occur frequently:

- Teachers change their attitude toward the teaching and assigning of writing. Consequently, students change their attitude about writing.
- Secondary English teachers show greater interest in teaching basic writing skills.
- Teachers start to expect higher quality in student writing.
- Teachers adopt more consistent standards in grading papers.
- Teachers often see the need to change their methods of teaching writing and to carefully examine and sometimes change the English or languages arts curriculum.

In 1979, Michael Scriven of the University of San Francisco released the results of a three-year evaluation of BAWP, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It cited BAWP as "the best large-scale effort to improve composition now in operation in this country, and certainly the best upon which substantial data are available."

Scriven noted, however, that he encountered great technical difficulties in attempting to assess classroom results of BAWP. In other words, he could not show direct cause-and-effect for changes in students' writing as a result of their teachers' involvement with BAWP. But he told Gray that "BAWP has stronger soft data than any hard data I know of."

Scriven cited, for example, the continuing enthusiasm for the project among participants, regardless of their grade level or years of involvement. Why this enthusiasm? Scriven cited these factors: the treatment of teachers as extremely valuable resources, heavy emphasis on the importance of teach-

ers doing more writing themselves, the stress on holistic assessment, and peer criticism (both of teachers' writing and students' writing).

Since that time, several of the BAWP offshoots have presented proof of effectiveness:

• The New Jersey Writing Project, started at Rutgers University, was "validated" or declared exemplary by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel of the U.S. Department of Education in May 1979. The panel based its judgment on evidence presented by the project directors. They said students of teachers who had participated in the project made significant increases in writing performance. Another finding: The students exhibited a more positive attitude toward writing than students of teachers who did not participate. The codirectors also found that the teachers who participated in the project placed greater emphasis on the content of writing, while teachers in the control group thought spelling and grammar were more important aspects of writing.

• The Chicago Area Writing Project was "validated" or approved for dissemination to other schools in Illinois based on evidence of effectiveness that it presented to the Illinois State Board of Education. The project found that students whose teachers were trained in the project's summer institute made twice as much progress in writing as those in the control schools. Stated in other terms, over one-third of the scores for project students improved one point on a five-point scale, whereas fewer than one-fourth of the scores improved for control students. The scores of more control students than project students declined.

Support and Growth

Many of the BAWP offshoots generate support from local districts equal to that at the Berkeley site. Robert Weiss of the Pennsylvania Writing Project noted, for example, that local school administrators must endorse candidates for participation in each summer institute offered at his site and that each endorsement entails a fee (\$700 per teacher in 1981). "School administrators and school board members in our region," he reported, "are sufficiently impressed with the project that we do not lack for applications to our summer institute." In 1981, the project had 37 summer fellows, 29 of whom were "endorsed" by their districts. The others participated under grants.

Weiss also noted that the project, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, established additional training sites at five other

colleges and universities in the state.

The California State Legislature guaranteed the continuation of BAWP in California by including in the annual budget for the University of California a line item for basic support of the project.

The Hawaii Writing Project was granted \$40,000 in annual support from the Hawaii Legislature, starting in 1982.

The Virginia State Department of Education included a line item of \$850,000 for support of seven sites in that state during 1982-84. Similar moves are under way in several other states.

New directions: Both the BAWP site in Berkeley and the Northern Virginia Writing Project, located at George Mason University, Fairfax, are encouraging teachers to become researchers who complete studies of the effectiveness of different classroom methods, materials, or ideas for teaching writing. Some of the research is being turned into booklets that are available from BAWP.

Note: A list of all BAWP publications and a list of project sites are available from the Bay Area Writing Project, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

What has the work of BAWP meant for schools and districts? Gray put it this way: In the pockets surrounding the campuses where a BAWP site is located, there is some good work in writing going on in school districts. Each site, he said, is training from 500 to 1,200 teachers each year. In California alone, BAWP sites are reaching between 5 percent and 10 percent of the state's teachers every year. "That is significant. It's one indication that we really do have a program that can reach all the nation's teachers."



BAWP Case Study:
Milpitas, Calif.

Features To Note:
Extensive use of BAWP.
Leadership by superintendent.

Alice Kawazoe started out as the lone teacher in the 7,800-student Milpitas (Calif.) Unified School District who was trained to teach writing using the methods advocated by the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP).

Kawazoe participated in the BAWP summer institute in 1974. When she returned to school in the fall, Kawazoe requested that the district sponsor a BAWP inservice workshop for interested staff members. She was turned down, she said, because the district wasn't amenable to spending the money.

The teachers in the English department of Kawazoe's high school, however, did start to use holistic scoring of student writing samples, an idea Kawazoe brought back from the institute. Drawing on the work of some other BAWP participants, Kawazoe trained her peers in how to use the scoring technique.

Initially, the English teachers required a writing sample only of sophomores. "We didn't know what we were going to do with the results," Kawazoe said. "It was not in our minds then to use them for the placement of students." At the time, the district required students in grades 9 and 10 to take comprehensive English courses, but it allowed a choice of electives in grades 11 and 12.

New Superintendent Hired

When Richard P. (Pete) Mesa was hired as the new superintendent for Milpitas, his board gave him the charge of improving instruction. Implicit in that charge, Mesa said in an interview for this report, was the need to improve writing.

"I could tell by the scores (on the California Assessment Program and other measures) that the writing program was not what it should be."

Mesa was prepared to make changes. In his previous district, teachers of English, social studies, and science had participated in the Bay Area Writing Project, "and they had moved out in a strong way to improve writing."

Mesa's background as an ex-English teacher also played a considerable role in some of the decisions he made in his new district. For one thing, Mesa had known James Gray, BAWP director, for 17 years and had taken seminars from him. "Therefore I could make the connection between the problem and the resources that could be brought to bear on it."

Mesa called in two staff members: a vice principal of an elementary school and the principal of the high school. He told them he wanted to get BAWP started in the district. He learned in the meeting that Alice Kawazoe had already participated in a BAWP institute. Mesa immediately started to use her to set up BAWP workshops.

The district held its first BAWP inservice in the fall of 1979. Teachers of English and reading in

Teachers Work Out a Curriculum

"After so many speakers gave us ideas for teaching writing during a BAWP session, we were so inundated that we came out wondering how to incorporate the new ideas with what we already had," said Alice Kawazoe in describing the inservice training sessions conducted by BAWP for senior high English teachers in Milpitas, Calif.

"But that kind of inundation was good for our department — much better than having someone come in with a sequential program that all had to follow," she said. "The sorting out of the ideas has to be done by individual teachers and at the department level."

The Milpitas district brought small groups of teachers together in the summer to work out a new writing curriculum that incorporated the

ideas they picked up at BAWP workshops. How long does it take to revise a curriculum using this method? About three summers, Kawazoe said.

"We considered ideas that different teachers had, and we got together at each level (freshman, sophomore, and elective) and worked out a program," the Milpitas teacher said.

"I don't think we could have done it any other way. We have a good staff, but one that does not change rapidly. We do things deliberately and comprehensively," she said. "Each individual teacher in our department is very, very strong. If BAWP had come in with a program that was very structured, it would not have worked."

grades 7-12 were invited to attend, and approximately 40 did so. That first inservice was so popular, Kawazoe said, that another one was offered in the spring. It attracted some of the same teachers who had gone through the first inservice, plus additional teachers and some classroom aides.

With support from a state grant, the district offered a 20-day BAWP workshop in the summer of 1980. Elementary teachers were invited to attend for the first time. Two of the elementary teachers who were enthusiastic about the training returned to their schools and got other staff members interested. Consequently, the district ran two 10-week workshops for elementary teachers during the 1980-81 school year and two concurrent 10-week workshops in the fall of 1981. By that time, some of the elementary teachers had attended three 10-week sessions.

Between 1979 and 1981, some senior high school teachers in content areas other than English participated in BAWP training and started to emphasize writing in their classes. In addition, the principal of the senior high school, several administrators from the central office, and many elementary principals also participated in the training.

Other Changes

When the California State Legislature mandated

that each district require high school seniors to pass a district-developed minimum competency test before they could graduate, Milpitas decided to fulfill the writing requirement by using the annual writing sample and holistic scoring technique that Kawazoe had introduced in 1974.

More knowledge about the teaching of writing as well as evidence from the writing samples of inadequate student writing, moreover, led to revisions in course offerings. A basic writing class called English Essentials was started, and it subsequently became the remedial class for students who failed the writing portion of the proficiency test.

Later, the district added basic composition and intermediate composition as electives.

Students who write well enough to pass the proficiency test are steered around English Essentials and basic composition and into intermediate and advanced composition.

Results

What are the results of the district's extensive training effort and revised course offerings?

For the past couple of years, Mesa noted, student scores on the California Assessment Program have increased. "We have moved from the 35th to the 60th percentile in writing." Scores on the district's proficiency test show improvement as well, the

superintendent added. "Assuming that these tests show actual improvement in writing, it is clear that we have made significant improvement." He noted, however, that the district still needs to work on some areas of writing such as exposition skills.

Can the changes in scores be attributed to the inservice training provided by BAWP? There is at least one indication that they can. In one school in which all of the teachers had gone through BAWP training, 80 percent of the students passed the writing portion of the proficiency test. In other district schools, where not all teachers had participated in the training, the average pass rate was 40 percent, according to Kawazoe.

Lessons

What can other districts learn from Milpitas? Mesa has some concrete ideas about the improvement of instruction — ideas he pulls together in what he calls "a broad front approach."

"There are some things you can't do until you take care of other things," he noted. Specifically, the superintendent explained, his first priority was solving the district's fiscal problems.

"We had to look where resources were deployed and decide if they were being used for critical areas," Mesa said. "It was a matter of pulling money out of the system where it was not clearly linked to instruction and then deploying those resources to priority areas."

The changes in the operation of the district made possible the redirection of approximately \$400,000 to the improvement of instruction. Changes were made in the employment of people at the district level; directors of state and federal categorical programs were told these programs had to be self-sustaining and in addition pay part of the district's overhead costs; the food services program, which was already self-sustaining, was required to pay an overhead charge.

Above and beyond these concerns, however, Mesa was interested in making needed curriculum changes in the district.

Inservice training must be provided before a district starts to revise its curriculum, he noted. "Or, do it simultaneously."

Mesa requires principals to go through inservice training in general instructional skills. "I believe they should learn about teaching skills first and then move on to curriculum." Just as important in Mesa's view, however, is the selection of principals.

What advice would Mesa give to another superintendent who wanted to improve student writing? Mesa replied:

- Identify the teachers perceived by their peers to be the most competent and effective in the teaching of writing.
- Bring them together to carefully research the teaching of writing.
- Along with that research, make contact with a program that shows results. The criterion for the program selected should be a track record of showing impact on student achievement.
- Allow from a semester to a year for development of the program.
- During the following year, start to implement the program on a pilot basis.
- Between the second and third years, get trained teachers to instruct their peers at the level of implementation the district can afford.
- Implement the program on a fuller basis in the third year.
- During all of this time, continue staff development.

An important part of the development of a new program, Mesa advised, is bringing in outsiders on an ongoing basis. "The kind of outsider we try to bring in is someone steeped in the research — really knowledgeable in whatever area we are working on — who can be a walking resource to the teachers who are designing the curriculum, for example." Mesa doesn't worry about whether the outsider has classroom experience. "Initially, teachers are put off by an inexperienced person, depending on whom you bring in, but teachers more than anything want something that works."

In the case of the district's writing program, Mesa did not bring in this type of outsider because of the district's involvement with BAWP. "It's pretty well researched and has a track record of student achievement," Mesa noted.

What about superintendents who do not have background in the teaching of English? Mesa offered this advice: Find someone who understands writing — not necessarily at the level of a practitioner — but somebody who understands it structurally and fundamentally. The person should be able to take BAWP, for example, and evaluate what it has to offer and what should be taken from it. With BAWP or any other inservice program, Mesa advised, it is important to make sure that the coordinators and instructors who come into the district to conduct inservice workshops are topflight. They have to be able to do things such as clarify concepts that are not clearly understood by English teachers.

The superintendent seeking improvement, Mesa concluded, should start asking questions in a district that seems to have a coherent writing program.

A Talk with James Gray

*"Come and hear real teachers,
teachers with chalk on their arms and ink on their fingers."*

That slogan was written by some teachers in Daly City, Calif., who wanted to advertise an inservice training workshop that the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) was conducting in their school district.

It is one of James Gray's favorites because "it exemplifies the attitude that BAWP has."

Gray, the director of BAWP at the University of California at Berkeley, is portrayed by a close associate as "a very unique man in higher education." The associate credits Gray with being responsible for "a lot of what has gone on in improving writing." He added: "Gray's faith in teachers is phenomenal, and as long as he has kept that faith the project has expanded and grown."

In the following interview for this report, Gray answers some criticisms about BAWP and tells why the knowledgeable experience of teachers teaching writing in the classroom is at the heart of the project and its offshoots around the country.

Q. BAWP has been criticized for being too eclectic. Some critics say it should put more emphasis on research and less on teacher practices. How do you answer those critics?

A. We have always had criticism along that line. I answer this way: Over the years there have been negative comments such as "BAWP is a sophisticated 'show and tell'"; "BAWP lacks the authority of research"; "BAWP is a program of the blind leading the blind." All of these comments have come from academics, never from teachers.

We acknowledge that there is much known about the teaching of writing. Some of what we know comes from research, but a good bit of what we know comes from the experience of classroom teachers who, in the privacy of their own classrooms, have learned how to teach writing.

In the past, most teachers in the schools were not prepared to teach writing, no matter what grade levels they taught.

If teachers learned how to do anything, they had to learn it on the job. Some did. We have always said there are some great teachers out there if they could be identified.

We are not turning our backs on research findings. We have groups of teachers in our summer institutes and open program who spend time examining research findings and reading what has been published.

But what we are doing in addition to that — and what no one else seems to have done — is to tap the knowledge of teachers who have taught in real classrooms with real students.

Ultimately our project is a kind of translation project. To give teachers a research finding is not going to change their classroom practice. We have to find a way not only to make teachers aware of the finding but also we have to train them how to use it.

We try to get teachers familiar with what really works in the classroom — to take them through the experience and the practice — so they can then go back and use it with their students.

Most of what we know about teaching practices that are effective is coming from teachers. There are some things in research that are worthwhile, particularly if they have been replicated. We had a fine presentation a couple of years ago, for example, from Charles Cooper. He reported 10 findings from research and effective practices that have been replicated. We have been working with them since we heard that presentation; it was magnificent.

We put a priority on identifying good practices. We tend to believe what we hear from teachers when they give us a demonstration of what has worked in their classrooms.

Q. How about the teacher with little experience in the teaching of writing who is exposed to the multitude of techniques you offer, for example, in an inservice training session? Can that teacher return to the classroom and figure out how to teach writing from the smorgasbord of techniques offered?

A. When we run a standard 10-session inservice program in the schools, ideally we are giving teachers 10 presentations from 10 different teacher/consultants who are knowledgeable about teaching writing. The teachers in the school are hearing this smorgasbord, but they are hearing it in the atmosphere of a Bay Area workshop that is led by a coordinator. That coordinator is one of our key teachers. It is part of their job to make the sessions not just a smorgasbord. The best coordinators that we have are pulling things together, trying to come up with unity, trying to come up with the overriding principles that are coming through in the various presentations. So it is not just a smorgasbord under ideal conditions, and we try to be ideal. We try to be very careful in training and selecting coordinators.

The project is eclectic and always will be because it is always going to be open to whatever is out there that seems to be working. We want to always be open. We never want to put a box around what we know and say "this is it."

Q. Doesn't that imply that teachers will never finish with inservice training — that there will always be something new to be learned?

A. Yes. Staff development should be a continuous, ongoing project for teachers until they die or retire.

Q. How do you identify the key techniques that teachers must know?

A. When we identify participants or fellows for the summer institute, for example, we identify them on the basis of what they have done. We then put them in front of the group of participants and have them demonstrate what they do in the classroom. What really is happening is a sorting and winnowing. Some ideas are better than others. Some ideas are more transferable

than others. There is a kind of creaming off the top. By the end of the institute, most of the participants have identified the things they are going to use and the things they need to know in the teaching of writing.

We also can point to certain ideas that have come out of the project — general things that most teachers today will buy, such as "writing is a process." That is one idea that is in the consensus category or the creaming category. There are a lot of these basic truths that are coming through in our project.

Q. Will you ever be able to say you have found "the way" to teach writing?

A. No. After nine years of working with hundreds of great teachers, I simply can't say there is only one way. Teaching is an egocentric, dramatic act. The great teachers out there are their own show. There are some things they do because they are wise people, but they always have their little angles, or special approaches. I have been teaching writing for 30 years, and I still hang onto some things that work for me. Not many teachers do what I do. But I'm open. Even with this barrage of ideas I hear in BAWP, I still hang onto some things that are identifiably mine. That is just the way of teaching. We are not robots.

Q. What should an administrator do to improve the writing program in his or her school or district?

A. What we don't need are those fat curriculums. What I would like to see is a policy statement on writing put together by all faculty members — something they would hammer out themselves with the support of administrators. The statement should be a summary of the things they would like to do in their program. It should include the views of English teachers but also the views of teachers of other subjects who see writing as a way for students to learn. [Note: Gray cited the statement used by Phillips Exeter Academy as a model. See Chapter VII.]

Ideally, such a statement should come after the teachers have had time to think about writing.

Q. How much emphasis do you put on involving principals and administrators in the summer institutes and other programs you sponsor at the university?

A. Some other National Writing Projects are doing better at that than we are. We are not blind to the need. We have always been toying with the idea of having special programs on writing just for administrators; however, we have yet to do it.

Q. Can you realistically expect one teacher from a school or district who goes through BAWP training to cause change in the way writing is taught in his or her school or district?

A. We know that a writing program has a better chance if two or more teachers from a school are trained, because they can start to form a critical mass. We also know that our major impact is made through informal contacts. It's awkward for teachers to call their colleagues together to give them an inservice. You just don't do that with the people you have been drinking coffee with for the past 10 years. It's very hard to pull off. We've talked with teachers about this problem, and the kind of advice we've been getting from them is "play it cool. Let the other teachers come to you. They will come to you and say, 'What did you get out of that program last summer?' Then you tell them about the program in an informal, casual way. You share what you've learned, and you have an influence that way."

BAWP itself tries to help the teachers have an influence through the inservice programs we offer. We always hope that the teachers who attend our programs will get support from their school or district for the regular staff development program. Every year we conduct 30 to 40 such inservices for school districts in our area.

Q. What impact has BAWP had?

A. For one thing, there really was no writing program in elementary schools until BAWP. But we have been able to get across the idea

that the process of writing can be used with and taught to elementary students on up. That has been a major impact. I think we also have had a major impact by always bringing together elementary, secondary, and college instructors in one room. That affects the nature of curriculum development, policy, and understanding of how writing can be taught. In the past, teachers in senior high schools, for example, might sit down by themselves and decide what they should do about writing. And they would come up with something such as "we'll introduce the sentence in grade 9 and work up to the five-paragraph theme by grade 12," never even acknowledging that anything could be done before grade 9.

It is hard for me to imagine teachers putting up anymore with some of the kinds of inservice they were served in the past. We think BAWP has had a significant impact on all kinds of inservice training.

The momentum for the project is growing; the wave has not crested yet. The fact that we are in our ninth year in the Bay Area Writing Project and our sixth year in the National Writing Project is significant. Most programs have flowered quickly and then died. We have already reached a level of stability — just in terms of the number of years — that most programs have not been able to reach.

Q. What is the future of the project?

A. I'm optimistic. We are seeking new financial help, and we are hoping for federal legislation to support the project. I think the project has already reached the point where we don't have to prove it anymore. I have had more inquiries about starting new projects this year (1981-82) than in any previous year. In the past 18 months, I have had close to 50 inquiries.

I am optimistic because we have a program that has an extensive record of dissemination, unlike some in the past, and we have a program that involves practitioners, a program that is more than the recommendation of some blue-ribbon commission.

Individualized Language Arts

Individualized Language Arts (ILA) is called the "granddaddy" of all the writing projects by one of its developers, Edwin Ezor, a professor of reading and language arts at Jersey City (N.J.) State College.

Development of ILA began in 1966 in grades 1-6 at Roosevelt Elementary School, Weehawken, N.J. The school still serves as headquarters for ILA, but the program has spread to schools in 44 states.

ILA was started by a research team that was discontented with student writing: Jeanette Alder, supervisor of instruction for the Weehawken schools who became director of the program; Allen Schichtel, chairman of the Weehawken High School English Department; Edwin Ezor; and Ted Lane, also a professor of reading and language arts at Jersey City State College.

Alder obtained a grant under the now defunct Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the team began looking for a practical method of teaching writing.

Their research led to the development of 22 techniques that help youngsters to plan, write, and improve their compositions. Four of the techniques are considered "starters" or ways to help students start to write; 18 are improvement techniques.

These techniques are one of the main differences between ILA and some of the other more eclectic approaches to the teaching of writing. ILA is structured — which appeals to some teachers but not to others — and its intent is to give teachers a definite program they can apply immediately in their classroom. Unlike the Bay Area Writing Project, ILA does not emphasize that teachers must experience writing themselves in order to be able to teach writing.

ILA, the Bay Area Writing Project, and some other writing programs are similar, however, in the amount of stress they place on certain basic concepts. All believe that students should write daily, if at all possible; that writing must be a part of all subjects; that pre-writing activities, such as discussion of the topic, should precede actual writing; that grammar should be taught in the context of learning to write; that students should have ample opportunity to read their writing aloud and to work with their peers in composing and editing; and that teachers should maintain folders of student writing.

ILA Judged Effective

ILA was used and refined in one Weehawken elementary school and later extended to all grades

throughout the district. It came to national attention after it was "validated" or judged effective and worthy of federal dissemination in 1974 by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel of the U.S. Department of Education. It was the only writing program validated by the panel. Since then, the New Jersey Writing Project, a spinoff of the Bay Area Writing Project, also has received the federal seal of approval.

ILA developers convinced the federal panel of the program's effectiveness by presenting this evidence: Weehawken students in grades 3 and 7 wrote and rewrote compositions on topics of their own choosing at the beginning, middle, and end of the 1970-71 school year. A group of similar youngsters in a nearby community did the same. The Weehawken students had been taught by teachers trained in ILA techniques; the teachers of the other group had received no special training.

The writing samples were scrutinized for growth in 11 areas. The results showed that Weehawken youngsters were writing longer, richer, and more varied sentences, and that they exhibited more variety in their writing style, conveyed greater amounts of information, and used a higher proportion of compound and compound-complex sentences. The same Weehawken students, in a follow-up study in the 1971-72 school year, generally continued to show improvement in their writing.

Between 1974 and 1977, evaluations involving rural, suburban, and urban students in New Jersey districts in which teachers had been trained to use ILA techniques also showed significant gains in vocabulary, sentence structure, organization, mechanics, and grammar.

How Does ILA Work?

ILA's basic formula includes four elements: diagnosing student needs, establishing priorities for improvement, prescribing which of the 22 ILA techniques should be used to meet individual or group needs, and evaluating student progress. ILA gives guidance in all four areas in the *Teachers' Resource Manual*, a 279-page book so packed with ideas that many districts, in using the program, have produced their own, less-detailed mini-manuals, based on the original.

The techniques are arranged in sequential order, by level of difficulty. Generally, they fall into two categories: techniques to be used in producing a first draft and techniques for improving a composition.

ILA trainers tell teachers to use just a few of the easier techniques on an experimental basis for the first year or so, and to use only as much of the

technique as the maturity and ability of the class permit.

The techniques, when viewed as a whole, aim at giving students practice in using the four methods all writers use in moving from first draft to finished product: adding, subtracting, rearranging, or substituting words.

Here is an example of how one of the techniques, slotting, would be used: The teacher would ask students to write a sentence, slotting in the missing words. The sentence could be this: "The Declaration of Independence was written in the year ____ by ____ in the city of ____."

How To Tell a Successful Adoption

ILA trainers consider an adoption of ILA a success when teachers are applying the program consistently throughout the school year. More specifically, they say a successful adoption should contain the following "critical elements":

- ✓ Assignment of frequent writing activities, making use of ILA techniques in content areas as well as in English or language arts.
 - ✓ Ongoing diagnosis of students' writing, and prescriptive selection of techniques to meet needs.
 - ✓ Development of writing checklists to remind students to apply ILA techniques in every writing lesson.
 - ✓ Maintenance of individual writing folders for students.
 - ✓ Motivating students to write and giving them careful explanation of writing assignments.
 - ✓ Linking writing to other language arts.
 - ✓ Planning a variety of writing activities, including displays of student writing.
 - ✓ Evaluation of students in terms of individual growth or improvement over time.
 - ✓ Periodically conferring with students to note personal progress and continuing needs.
-

The teacher could use this technique in any content area to replace oral questions. Other techniques could be used to expand the basic sentence, if desired. Students could include more information, for example, telling "what kind of document" the Declaration of Independence is, "why" it was written, "what" the result was. This technique is called "expansion by modification."

To teach students to elaborate on their writing or to expand a single sentence into a paragraph, the teacher could also use another form of slotting. Students would be asked to list details on a sheet of paper which is divided into columns labeled "who," "what," "what happened," "when," "where," "how." Upon filling in the columns, the students would realize they have most of the information they need to write a paragraph or first draft.

This ILA technique, as well as all the others, can be modified to fit the needs of the students. The basic idea behind this technique, according to ILA developers, "is to get students to do some thinking before they write and to give them some substance to work with. It can bring highly abstract students down to earth and, at the other end of the scale, it can help learning disabled students to amplify their writing."

By the second year, the manual says, teachers should be ready to follow the ILA cycle of diagnosis, prescription, instruction, and evaluation.

At the beginning of the year, teachers diagnose needs by having each student write a composition. It could be preceded by oral discussion of possible topics. Students should have access to a dictionary as they write, and, if time permits, to write several papers at different times and turn in the best one.

Beginning in the middle grades, ILA suggests that teachers have students write the composition in an expository manner.

Teachers are advised to review the papers by looking for "gross, obvious, or serious" needs in each student's writing and to record their findings on a form that lists elements such as vocabulary, sentence structure, organization. ILA's *Resource Manual* includes a "diagnostic grid sheet" that can be used for this purpose, or teachers may devise their own method of recording the information.

Using the results, teachers then establish (1) common needs, (2) needs shared by some students, and (3) individual needs. From this tabulation, ILA suggests that teachers establish priorities in teaching or "minimal, conservative objectives" to be met during the school year.

The teacher can then turn to the *Resource Manual* to plan a sequence of recommended prescriptive

techniques. If run-on sentences are a common problem, for example, the manual says the teacher could have students read their writing aloud, or use the slotting technique or another technique called "sentence reduction."

If clear, accurate use of words, on the other hand, is one of the teacher's objectives, the variety of techniques could include oral reading, many forms of slotting techniques, or dictionary activities.

ILA suggests that the procedure of formal diagnosis be repeated at midyear to gauge student progress and at the end of the year to discern the impact of the total program and make adjustments for the following year.

Informal diagnosis should be done on a daily basis or each time a writing activity is carried on, the program developers suggest.

The *Resource Manual* acknowledges that a secondary English teacher with a class load of 125 to 150 students, working a little at a time, would require a couple of weeks to complete a thorough formal diagnosis. But the time is worthwhile in the view of the program's developers. Otherwise, they say, teachers cannot shape their classes to meet the needs of students.

Program Spreads Across U.S.

When ILA was "validated" or approved for dissemination to schools nationwide, it became eligible to compete for federal dissemination funds under the National Diffusion Network (NDN).

NDN is a nationwide system that enables schools to "adopt" federally approved programs such as ILA. Stated in the simplest terms, an adoption means that the staff of the approved program provides inservice training and follow-up services to teachers and administrators in a school or district that wants to duplicate the program.

NDN also funds "state facilitators," who serve as brokers between local schools in their region or state and the NDN programs. They help schools define their problems, and they make the schools aware of NDN programs that could offer a solution. The methods used by different facilitators vary, but all are charged with making the adoption process as simple as possible for schools.

The services of the facilitators and of the staffs of the NDN programs are available at no charge to schools.

Inservice Training the ILA Way

ILA trainers provide two days of inservice training for teachers in a school making an adoption.

Administrators are also invited to attend the session so they are aware of how the program operates and how it should be evaluated.

Most ILA training sessions are conducted by Alder or Ezor and his wife, Rita, at the adopting school. However, ILA periodically holds large training sessions at its home base, open to any teachers or administrators who wish to attend.

During the two-day training session, participants become familiar with ILA's diagnostic, prescriptive, and teaching techniques. Most important, the teachers become students. They use the techniques as they are learning about them. They also make sample materials to take back to their classrooms.

"We have found that 'hands-on' experience which produces materials suited to the teacher's school is better than handouts," said Alder. "We distribute few written materials because we are concerned with a process — writing."

Most participants purchase a copy of the *Resource Manual* (cost \$10). It is available only to

ILA: Too Structured, Too Limiting?

"I don't like ILA because it is too structured, too limiting."

That criticism, in different forms, came from several educators who were interviewed for this report. Jeanette Alder, the director of ILA, said teachers in inservice training sessions sometimes make similar remarks or say they feel that students will get bored using ILA techniques.

She answers, in part, by stating that students also can get bored in traditional programs in filling out endless workbooks and ditto sheets, in underlining subjects and verbs, and in studying grammar for its own sake and with no direct tie to real writing.

"Saying ILA is boring or repetitive," she noted, "is like saying the same thing about the alphabet. The only thing that limits the use of ILA is the teacher's imagination."

Alder stressed that any teacher can combine the use of ILA techniques with the content and information needed in any subject to come up with successful student writing, which can contribute to thinking and learning in that subject.

those who go through formal training as part of an ILA adoption.

The training sessions serve some other purposes, in addition to introducing participants to the manual. The trainer, for instance, can set straight any misconceptions participants may have about the teaching of writing and also elaborate on how to adjust ILA techniques to the needs of different students and different classes.

The trainers also pass on tips for making the program work successfully. In one inservice session, for example, Ezor offered participants these tips:

- Begin writing by discussing the topic with students and by incorporating reading, speaking, and listening.
- If teachers can overcome the idea that writing is a separate subject, the program is easy to implement.
- A writing program needs continuity. Ideally, it should start in the first grade with oral activities.
- Daily practice in writing is as necessary as daily exercise. "The daily 15-minute writing assignment is the key to good writing."
- The most difficult problem to deal with is clumsy, unclear writing.
- Work for clarity first, then expansion of writing.
- Encourage students to do at least some group work in composing.
- Start a writing folder at the beginning of the year for each student. Include diagnostic writing samples and other examples of student work. Pass the folders on to the teacher at the next grade level.
- Do not hold students responsible for anything they have not been taught.
- Get students into the habit at the beginning of the year of reading aloud.
- Have all students develop a "mechanics" checklist they can use in editing their own writing.
- From grade 5 on, make students responsible for correcting their spelling errors.

Ezor also commented on some of the advantages of the program. ILA, he said, relieves teachers of what to teach, and it's logical. Teachers don't complain about the lack of time, he added, because students are correcting their own work, doing their own editing, and proofreading. "The program becomes your writing program; you don't need any-

thing else." On the other hand, he said, ILA can be used as a supplement to another program.

Start small. Ideally, Alder said, an adoption should start with the training of at least a few experienced teachers from different grade levels — teachers who are enthusiastic about the program. More teachers can be brought in later.

What a school or district should not do is to force the program on a whole staff at the same time. The slower approach, using volunteer teachers, results in a better adoption. The best way to sell the program, ILA developers believe, is to show the "before" and "after" results of students' work. "Teachers are convinced about the effectiveness of the techniques," Alder commented, "when they see growth."

After the adoption is made. If teachers have questions after they start to use the techniques in their own classrooms, they may consult with the ILA trainers by phone or letter. Some schools also request the trainers to return for a second session several months or more after the initial workshop.

In many schools, a teacher with experience in the program and the ability to teach other teachers becomes the school or district ILA trainer. The program has officially "certified" 55 persons in 17 states who are considered qualified to offer inservice training in ILA in their district, region, or state.

Alder also recommends that adopting districts designate a liaison person — whether principal, department chairperson, or teacher — to stay in touch with the program for ongoing help and support. It is not uncommon, moreover, for ILA-trained teachers to hold informal or formal meetings on a school, district, region, or statewide basis in order to help each other and to share what they have learned about writing.

ILA Is Meeting Needs

Some districts are using ILA to meet state requirements or to prepare students for minimum competency tests in writing. Some examples and results:

- **The Pearl River (N.Y.) Schools**, which adopted ILA in 1978-79, noted no failures at the middle school level in the writing portion of the state minimum competency test. The Hyde Park (N.Y.) Central Schools similarly credits ILA for decreasing the failure rate of its students on the same test by 50 percent.
- **The Hatboro-Horsham (Pa.) School District** uses ILA as part of its comprehensive reading/communications art plan required of all Pennsylvania districts. Four of the ILA techniques

(sentence synthesis, the framed paragraph, expansion, and outlining), the district notes, are extremely useful in all content areas at all grades because they help students develop better study and organizational skills. Primary teachers in the district are using ILA as the basis for integrating reading and writing activities.

In the Farmingdale (N.Y.) Public Schools, John F. Rooney, chairman of English, grades K-9, uses ILA as one of the resources for paperbound collections of "Writing Strategies for the Eighties." The documents keep teachers and administrators in Rooney's district up to date on research and practices in the teaching of writing.

ILA is having its largest impact in the states of Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Texas.

In 1979-80, ILA had more adoptions (648) than any other program in the federal government's National Diffusion Network. A complete tally of adoptions for 1980-81 was not available as this report went to press. But, noted one of the trainers, "we expect it to be well over 500."

Note: For more information, contact Jeanette Alder, Project Director, Individualized Language Arts, Wilson School, Hauxhurst Ave., Weehawken, N.J. 07087.



ILA Case Study: Hyde Park, N.Y.

Features To Note:

- Adoption of Individualized Language Arts.
- Progress in getting writing into all grades, all subjects.
- Long-term commitment.

In 1976, the Board of Education of the Hyde Park (N.Y.) Central School District identified language arts as one of its priorities. When administrators and teachers reviewed the curriculum to see what was already being done in writing, however, they were surprised to learn that the district, which serves 4,800 students in a rural/suburban, middle class area, had no defined program. Writing was

part of the "hidden curriculum."

In an interview for this report, Frank Gray, assistant superintendent for instruction, detailed additional discoveries the district made about writing — discoveries that were being duplicated by districts all around the country in the mid- to late-1970s.

The district found, for example, that:

- Although writing was assigned and corrected, "we were not teaching students how to do it."
- "Although we had an excellent teaching staff, our teachers were not prepared to teach writing." The English teachers had no better training in teaching writing than other teachers.
- "We first thought of writing as a distinct content area. But, on closer examination, we decided it had a strong connection to reading and other communication skills."
- Students should write not just in English classes but in all content areas. Writing should be a responsibility of all teachers; therefore, all would need training.

With the need clearly established, and with the intent of integrating writing into all subjects at all grade levels, the district searched for successful writing programs. "We looked at the Bay Area project," Gray noted, "but at that time, we felt it placed too much emphasis on having teachers become writers and getting them excited about writing, whereas we wanted a reteaching, retraining program on how to teach writing."

"The only thing we found that we thought would enable teachers to teach writing effectively was the Individualized Language Arts (ILA) program in Weehawken, N.J. We realized," Gray continued, "it was not a new approach; rather, it pulled together the best of what was known about the teaching of writing."

Elementary Teachers Express Interest

Several elementary teachers volunteered to take part in inservice training sessions offered by ILA. After trying out the techniques in their classrooms, they told Gray: "This approach is good enough to share with our colleagues. It works."

That was in 1978. The district sponsored additional ILA inservice training sessions for staff members, each time requesting ILA trainers Edwin and Rita Ezor to return to the district to provide the training.

Later, the district sent teachers to ILA training sessions at the program's home base in New Jersey.

With a large cadre of teachers trained in the program, the district eventually assumed responsi-

bility for conducting its own training in the use of ILA.

Elementary teachers then developed curriculum guides for writing in the content areas, using ILA as a base. This enabled them not only to break down the ILA techniques into smaller units, but it made them feel the program was "theirs," rather than one adopted from another school district. The same thing happened at the junior and senior high level; consequently, the district now has its own manuals of writing techniques for elementary, junior, and senior high schools — all adapted from ILA.

Minimum Competencies Promote Writing

While the district was implanting ILA as its writing program, the New York State Education Department was developing minimum competencies that all students in the state were required to pass. Writing was one of the areas to be tested.

The Hyde Park district decided to establish additional minimum competencies in writing for each elementary grade. In effect, this made teachers of all grades, starting with kindergarten, responsible for teaching writing. Further, the district stipulated that promotion from grade to grade would be based partially on the student's ability to pass grade level competencies.

New York State's minimum competency mandate also had a positive effect on writing in the high school. Manny Carreras, the high school principal, said all he had to do was pass on the mandate to teachers and then work with them in assuring that students would be prepared to pass the writing test.

Thus, Carreras said he was able to avoid the method followed by many high school principals — "to proclaim that the school has a writing problem and to say, 'we are going to solve it.'"

Carreras told his staff, however, that he had "certain expectations in writing." He defined his expectations in terms of the number of papers students had to write in each class. By doing so, he put pressure on all secondary teachers to determine how they could get students to meet his expectations. The immediate result was more writing in all high school classes.

If the secondary teachers had any doubts about the seriousness of Carreras' expectations, they disappeared when the principal himself went through the inservice training provided by ILA. His example, in turn, caused many secondary teachers to become interested in taking the training.

"The teachers knew I had central office and board support," Carreras said. "I went to the train-

ing sessions. I also told the teachers I knew it was not their fault they did not know how to teach writing and that we would provide the training and go from there."

The resulting success in getting more writing into high school classes was attained, Carreras believes, "because the district said 'we will do this together.' And then it proceeded to provide inservice training, supplies, ample time for putting the program in place, and released time, when necessary, for teachers to attend inservice workshops or to work out problems related to implementing the program."

Carreras now requires all teachers to submit a list of their assignments involving writing and to show him the results. (Other principals in the district are similarly responsible for monitoring the writing program in their schools.)

The district also "flags" for special attention any students who are believed to need special help to pass the minimum competency tests. Teachers are required to keep a special folder of the writing of each of these students. The folders are reviewed by the principals.

How Successful?

Evidence of the impact of the district's new approach to writing is available in several forms:

- The amount of student writing in all classes increased substantially.
- Teachers are using the ILA techniques to teach writing in all content areas. "Staff members in all areas of the curriculum have found that many of the things they would do normally in class can be used as a writing exercise," Carreras noted. (The district helped this "across-the-curriculum" effort by providing for training sessions by departments. Math teachers or social studies teachers, for example, are brought together to work out how they will use writing techniques with students.)
- Practically no students have failed the writing competency test.

Although reading scores in the district have improved dramatically, Gray said he is not ready to claim that the improvement is related to the increase in writing. On the other hand, he does not reject the idea that the improvement is more than a coincidence.

Another indication of the positive effect of the writing program is parental support. Parents were happy when the program was started, Carreras said,

because it meant that students would be writing in school. But they expressed some concerns, he said, "when they saw papers that did not have all the t's crossed and i's dotted. However, we got them to understand what we were doing. We explained that a paper with these kinds of errors are 'under construction' and not yet completed."

Ongoing Support

ILA is firmly entrenched in the Hyde Park schools, and administrators are committed to strengthening it. In fact, Gray said, the district is currently engaged in "the most important part of our implementation": working with trainers in writing.

The trainers are full-time classroom teachers with a special assignment: assisting with the writing program in their respective schools. The teachers volunteer for the assignment but they must be approved by the principal and other teachers in their school. There is one trainer in each of the district's five elementary schools, three in the junior high school, and four in the senior high school.

The trainers are put on contract and approved by the Board of Education. They are paid a stipend of \$100 annually and \$18 for each "presentation hour," or hour in which they are providing training in writing.

The primary job of the trainers is to work with teachers. They give demonstration lessons on the use of a specific ILA writing technique, and they consult with any teacher who encounters a problem in the teaching of writing. In addition, they work with Gray in developing the district's inservice plan in writing and work with their respective principals in personalizing the plan to the needs of students in their buildings.

Gray said the district still has about five years to go in fully implementing the writing program and in integrating writing into all subjects in the school district.

The temptation, he said, is not to continue the strong emphasis on the program. "So our job as administrators is to steer the ship to be sure we stay on course and to consistently evaluate what we are doing.

"The great problem," he added, "is to focus our resources — particularly time — where we can do the most good. We have to make sure we stick with the goals we have and not get blown off course when something else comes along."



Case Study: Lancaster, Pa.

Features To Note:

Experimentation with two different approaches to writing.

Curriculum under construction.

"Our duty is to help our teachers teach writing in the way they feel is best."

That statement sums up the philosophy of the 5,000-student Manheim Township School District, Lancaster, Pa., according to Rose Stetler, coordinator of special services.

The district, Stetler said in an interview for this report, "has done a lot of searching" in an attempt to find out how to produce the quality it wants in student writing. "The kids were doing fine in reading, as measured by tests, but we were not pleased with writing."

The search yielded two different, well known approaches to the teaching of writing and an evaluation system developed by another school district. While starting to use all three new approaches, the district also began revising its own language arts curriculum.

District officials found that teachers in grades K-8 generally favored the approach advocated by Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire. "They felt," Stetler said, that this approach was "more motivating for their children and would cause children to get into writing."

To accommodate the elementary teachers, the district hired Lucy McCormick Calkins, who works with Graves, to conduct eight full days of inservice training. Both elementary and secondary teachers attended. The district also brought in a team of consultants from the University of New Hampshire for two days of training in the summer of 1981. District staff who attended these sessions were given responsibility for sharing what they had learned with peers at their grade level.

All teachers of grades 9-12 and several teachers of grades 7 and 8 decided they wanted to pursue a different type of writing instruction for their students. They selected Individualized Language Arts (ILA), a program based in Weehawken, N.J. Their

rationale: "They liked the structure of the program, and they felt it offered certain elements that both their less able and top students could use." Even so, Stetler said, the district "adapted" the program to its needs, rather than "adopting" all components of it.

Twenty-one teachers (15 from the high school level and six middle school teachers) attended two all-day workshops on ILA techniques taught by Edwin and Ritz Ezor, two of the program's staff trainers. "After the teachers attended the workshops and became more familiar with ILA, they met in department and curriculum meetings and picked the specific techniques they wanted to use at each grade level," Stetler added: "We were not ready to throw in the towel on some of the things we were already doing, so we gleaned carefully."

Putting Together a New Curriculum

Stetler is the "team leader" responsible for monitoring what happens at various grade levels. She is assisted by a nine-person team: the department chairperson at the high school and at the middle school levels and seven grade level persons from the district's elementary schools.

These nine persons, working with Stetler and James C. Bowman, the director of instruction, completed a draft for a new writing curriculum during the summer of 1981.

Teachers in the district were each given a copy of the curriculum when they returned to school in the fall. They were told to "annotate" it throughout the school year. In other words, the teachers were given instructions to answer the following questions about the directives in the curriculum: Did this work with your students? If it worked, what happened? If it did not, why do you think it failed? What kinds of things did you have to do to make this work with your particular grade? The teachers' comments will be used to revise the curriculum guide.

Evaluation

In its search for an evaluation model, the district learned about the one developed by the Grosse Pointe (Mich.) Public School System (see Chapter X). Roger McCaig, the Grosse Pointe director of research and evaluation, was brought in as a consultant for two days in the summer to help the district determine how to assess student writing.

Following a pilot assessment in 1980, the district started to assess all grades in 1981.

Keeping Parents Informed

Parents have been kept informed of the district's search for the best way to teach students to write. They have expressed some concerns, such as wanting to know more about "invented spelling" (children's first attempts to spell words), and what happens in peer conferences and conferences with teachers.

But, Stetler said, parental response to the writing program has been "tremendous." Some parents have donated time to help children read their writing, and almost every building has groups of parent volunteers who assist with publishing and binding student writing into books.

Prognosis

"Since this is only our second year into our new approach to writing," Stetler said, "we don't know specifically what the results will be. We do feel very positive about what we are doing, however, at both the elementary and secondary levels." And because the district allowed teachers at each level to determine what they wanted to use, "we are not having any trouble with either program."



The Principal's Role

What is the principal's role in developing and maintaining an effective writing program?

The answer to that question depends on whether the principal is at the elementary or secondary level; what kind of support the principal has in the form of curriculum specialists, language arts coordinators, or special teachers; how much time is available; whether the superintendent considers writing a priority for the district; and the principal's interest in writing.

Whether the principal is solely or partially responsible for the writing program, the following perspective on the principal's role in improving instruction may prove enlightening. It is taken from a paper prepared for the federal Basic Skills Office by Madeline Hunter, professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles:

"Some principals erroneously feel that they must be able to teach better than the teachers they are to help. Can coaches play better than their players? No, but they must know, recognize, and be able to generate in the players the skills required by the game.

"Principals must know, recognize, and encourage in teachers' classroom performance the skills required by the game of instruction. Principals must be able to use the same theory and principles which support successful teaching to help teacher and student increase their proficiency . . .

"The inservice education or advanced degree most needed by principals is one which equips them with knowledge and skills necessary to assist with, but insist on, escalating teaching effectiveness and instructional leadership. This does not mean that all teachers' inservice education must be done by the principal, but only that the principal is in a position to permit, encourage, and demand professional growth, to monitor by classroom observation to determine if it has occurred, and to reward the

teacher for the effort and energy required and the results achieved."

Some persons would add to Hunter's description another important role for the principal: dealing with parents and other members of the community in explaining and sometimes defending the school's approach to writing.

Here are some other views:

Inservice training a must: Principals and administrators must involve themselves in inservice training in writing, said Robert Weiss, director of the Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester, an offshoot of the Bay Area Writing Project. "The typical principal does not have an English/language arts background, and anyone who does not have training is likely to fall back on drill and basics," he said in an interview for this report.

Principals, he added, need to learn what a writing class should look like. "The principal should see, and know it is all right to see, students working in groups, noise, and interaction. The principal needs to know that a writing class should not look like a teacher-centered class, with the teacher lecturing, standing in the middle of the room holding chalk."

Also making a strong case for the principal's participation in a school writing program is Lois Libby, coordinator of a basic skills program, who works out of the Cooperative Educational Services Center, Norwalk, Conn.

"The principal is the key variable in the success of a writing program" because he or she can, through actions and support, make the difference in a schoolwide effort to improve writing, Libby explained.

Principals, she added, have to be aware of the impediments to writing programs "and not be part of the problem — because of the way they were taught."

Superintendent's view. Supt. Oscar Bedrosian of

the Lincolnshire-Prairie View School District, Prairie View, Ill., expects his principals to be good managers and leaders. This means, he said, they must have a basic grounding and enough working knowledge of the curriculum — “an average expertise” — to maintain credibility with the staff.

Supt. Roland M. Miller of the Lenox (Mass.) Public Schools has a slightly different view. In Lenox, the principal is responsible for monitoring the writing program in the elementary school. Like most of her counterparts in other schools around the country, this principal does not have as much training in writing as the classroom teachers. But, noted Miller, “she has enough training that she is able to supervise the program.”

If a principal wants to start a writing program, what should he or she do? Paul Eschholz, director of the Vermont Writing Program, responded to that question. A principal of a school with 16 to 20 faculty members, he said, should try to get four or five of them interested in the first year. “If they were doing a bang-up job, I’d be satisfied.” In the second year, he suggested, try to get another four or five interested, then six or seven in the third year. “If you try to get all 20 doing the exact same thing from day one — with the same degree of enthusiasm — you get more resistance than if you build slowly.”

“There is no worse way to get something started,” Eschholz said, “than to try to filter it down from the top. Even if the principal is under pressure from the central office or from parents, he cannot pass on his priorities to the staff. Otherwise,” the Vermont educator noted, “the consultant who is called on to give training workshops for teachers will be greeted in the first training session as the enemy.” Eschholz concluded: “The program has to be a cooperative effort with the teachers participating.”

Instead of forcing teachers to accept a program, the principal could send some teachers into another district where the writing program is going well. “Let them see what is happening in classrooms, rather than trying to tell them, ‘this is what you should be doing,’” Eschholz advised. And, he added, principals should grant professional days for teachers to make such visitations.

In another interview for this report, Manny Carreras, principal of the secondary school in the Hyde Park (N.Y.) Central School District, was asked about the advisability of mandating a writing program. (Carreras successfully maneuvered his staff into accepting a writing program. See case study in Chapter VIII.)

Carreras replied: “It depends on the relationship

between the principal and the staff and the amount of support the principal has from the top administration and the board of education.”

But, the New York principal noted, a mandate from the central office or the principal carries with it certain obligations: to provide inservice training, to give additional support, to obtain needed supplies, and to allow released time, where necessary, for teachers to attend inservice training, and ample time for teachers to work out problems related to the new writing program.

Tips for Principals

Persons interviewed for this report, including teachers, directors of writing programs, school administrators, and authorities in writing, listed various duties and suggestions for principals interested in starting or maintaining a writing program. Here are their suggestions:

To Gain Interest in Improving Writing

1. Take advantage of the opportunity to get a program going when staff members talk about the need to upgrade standards, to give students more writing assignments, or to revise the curriculum.
2. Arrange time for teachers to get together to agree on what constitutes good writing and how it can be taught or on a sequential plan for the teaching of writing.
3. Arrange for a few teachers to see an exemplary writing program in action in another school or district. The trip alone heightens the experience and accomplishes more than if the teachers are released to visit a colleague's class in the same building.
4. Conduct a schoolwide assessment of student writing, and arrange for all teachers to participate in scoring the writing samples. Make the results known in a faculty meeting, followed by time for discussion of the results and implications for the school program.
5. Encourage teachers who are most enthused about improving writing to participate in an inservice training project, such as the Bay Area Writing Project or one of its offshoots around the country.
6. Watch for “awareness” programs or special training sessions for administrators in the pro-

cess of writing. Sign up for one of them.

7. Drop in on inservice training sessions in writing for teachers; better yet, participate.

Once a Program Is Under Way

1. Encourage teachers to teach writing and to have students write.
2. Do all that you can to help teachers organize and carry out writing in their classrooms. Ask teachers, for example, what kinds of supplies they need and in what quantity.
3. Recognize teachers who are doing a good job in the teaching of writing.
4. Visit the classrooms of teachers who are teaching writing. Spend time in finding out what they are trying to accomplish, what the difficulties are, what students are doing.

5. Take advantage of the skills gained by teachers in inservice sessions on writing. Recognizing teachers as "professionals" rewards them for the time and effort they put into improving writing. The school or the district gains, moreover, if the trained teachers are willing to open their classes to observation by other teachers, or if they can help provide inservice training for their peers.

6. Encourage teachers to do exchange teaching with feeder schools or with schools at a higher level, as a first step toward developing a sequential curriculum and instruction.

7. Ask trained, confident teachers to explain and demonstrate the process of writing to groups of parents and to members of the school board and the community.

8. Find/make time for teachers to talk with each other about problems in student writing and the teaching of writing.

Inservice: An Essential for Administrators

Principals and other administrators — like most adults — are insecure about their writing. This is one of the reasons they often shun inservice training workshops on writing.

Yet, the advantages of attendance are manifold. For one thing, principals can set an example for other staff members who may be just as reluctant to sign up for a course on writing. And when principals make the time to attend an inservice, they signal staff members that writing clearly is a priority.

Some of the directors of writing projects interviewed for this report stressed that principals should participate in inservice sessions *along with* teachers. "The advantage of having administrators and teachers attend the same sessions is that it gets the whole faculty talking about academic things for a change and it gets them pulling in the same direction," noted Paul Eschholz of the Vermont Writing Program.

What can administrators expect to learn in inservice training? Here is the daily schedule

for a five-day workshop for administrators, as offered by the New Hampshire Writing Project:

- 9:00-10:45 Writing time (all participants write)
- 11:00-12:30 Presentation of writing by individual participants
- 1:30- 3:00 Writing workshop. The topics include:
 - What is the writing process?
 - How should we respond to student work?
 - How should we evaluate writing?
 - How do students develop as writers?
 - How can administrators support a writing program?

The outside reading for such a course is minimal. Under the New Hampshire format, for example, administrators are required to read articles by Donald Graves and Donald Murray and *On Writing Well*, a book by William Zinsser.

9. Discuss with teachers the tough issues they face, such as how to answer parent questions and concerns, how to reduce the paperwork burden, how to motivate unmotivated students, how to evaluate student writing.

10. Support the school coordinator of the writing program or the department chairman, both vocally and in actions. Coordinators who teach classes, for example, may appreciate having free time during a certain period of the day. Ask them how the schedule can be altered to accommodate them in carrying out their jobs.

11. Participate in or lead a task force in a school-wide attempt to determine how all teachers will approach writing.

12. Consider bringing in an expert teacher of writing to work in the classroom with students while other teachers observe.

13. Make parents aware of the direction of the writing program. Explain, for example, the school policy on the teaching of grammar, correction of papers, how progress will be measured.

14. Let teachers know you will back them in conferences with parents.

15. Provide professional materials so teachers can keep up with current research and practices in writing.

16. Find ways to use available staff development money for released time for teachers to work and plan together. One example: bring together an English and a social studies teacher to plan across the curriculum activities. This can do more to further across the curriculum efforts, said one district representative, than holding a large meeting on the same topic for the entire faculty. As a result, these two teachers could attest to the workability of the idea at a faculty inservice meeting on the topic later on.

17. Respond favorable to teachers' request for advanced training in writing or for an additional inservice session "that ties everything together" or that serves as a refresher course on the writing process.

18. Talk about and work toward a long-range plan for the teaching of writing. Be an advocate of good writing.



Case Study: **Stowe, Vt.**

Features To Note:

Leadership by principal.
Participation in model program.
Information sessions for parents.

"In 1976, I became concerned about the amount and quality of writing taking place in my school, so I spent a year doing research, trying to find out who was teaching teachers to teach writing. I came up with very little."

That is the recollection of Marjorie Cook, principal of the Stowe (Vt.) Elementary School.

Five years later, Cook's school was one of six model schools participating in a statewide writing program directed by Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa of the University of Vermont (see Chapter VI).

What happened during those five years can be attributed to Cook's interest in the teaching of writing, her interpretation of what it means to be a principal, and her determination to do whatever was necessary to get a good writing program going in her 265-student school.

Cook decided a major training effort was needed for her teachers after she informally polled the 21 staff members and found that "not one of us had had a course on how to teach writing." The closest they could come in terms of actual preparation was one course in creative writing taken by Cook and courses in rhetoric by several other staff members.

"The staff saw the need to do something, but I still had to sell them on the idea that we all had a responsibility to start to teach writing." A great believer in "doing a lot of groundwork when I want my staff to do something," Cook finally settled on a consultant who conducted six sessions on writing. The result was unsatisfactory, Cook said, because the consultant did not seem to be able to get beyond the research, while the teachers needed to know how a writing program would work in real classrooms.

In the third year of her search for a writing program, Cook heard about the work being done by Eschholz and Rosa. "At the time (summer 1978), they were running one-week orientation sessions in

the process of writing, open to Vermont school administrators, and three-week training sessions open to teachers. I wanted to learn the process solidly, so I asked if I could be accepted as a teacher." She and one teacher from her school were accepted for the three-week session.

Following the training, Cook said she finagled her way into teaching writing to fifth-grade students in her school one hour every day from the beginning of school until Thanksgiving. The regular teacher remained in the classroom, observing Cook as she put into practice what she had learned in the summer training session.

After the holiday, the teacher said to Cook: "Good-bye. I can take over now; I've got it down." Cook then started to work with other teachers, teaching them the writing process.

In the summer of 1981, Cook and her staff applied to have their school named as one of the state's model schools in writing. Upon acceptance, Cook, 13 classroom teachers, and several special education teachers were enrolled in the summer training sessions at the University of Vermont. "I went through the training again because I thought I would be more effective in guiding the program if I participated. I am the only principal in the state, to my knowledge, who went about this the way I did, but I think it is the right way for me." (Other administrators took the one-week orientation instead of the three-week intensive course.)

Lessons learned. The school learned some important lessons about starting a writing program and also made some errors along the way, the principal admitted. When Cook was teaching writing in a classroom, for example, a mother's comments about the wordiness of her child's writing draft, repeated by the child in class, alerted Cook to the need to thoroughly explain the writing program to parents. She held a two-hour session for parents, taking them step-by-step through the writing process, explaining what they could expect their youngsters to be doing, what a rough draft is, and what they could expect their youngsters to achieve. In addition, she gave the parents a list of questions they could use in holding informal conferences with their children as they worked on writing. In 1981, Cook expanded the number of parent orientation sessions on writing to four, broken into groups by the grade level of their children.

Cook also paid attention to parents' concerns. In the first year of using the program, she explained, the teachers were so excited about the sheer fact that students were writing that they were not paying enough attention to grammar, punctuation, and

"Writing really puts the power where the power belongs, and that is in the hands of the learner."

—Marjorie Cook
Principal, Stowe Elementary School

spelling. "So, last year, we slightly revamped the process so that everything has to go through an editing conference before it is put in final draft form," she noted.

The staff had to relax some aspects of publishing students' work, because the teachers were getting upset about not being able to follow through on every piece of writing. Now, students write some of their final pieces in "good" handwriting, instead of having them typed and put into a hardbound book. Cook's main concern is that students complete their writing at least through the editing stage. "The parents understand that we cannot bring every piece of writing through the publishing stage," she said.

Parents are particularly impressed about their children's writing, Cook noted, because the school has a policy of saving every scrap of paper a child uses in doing a piece of writing — from the first scratch to the final product. It is all stapled together and brought out when teacher and parent have a conference on the child's work. "Parents cannot help but be impressed by the amount of work the child puts into a single piece of writing," the principal said.

Proof that it works. Cook, who shies away from claiming effectiveness of programs based on test scores, said, nevertheless, that student scores on standardized achievement tests in language arts have improved since the school got involved in the writing program.

In one of the first years that the district used the program, one sixth-grade class participated; another did not. The language test scores of those who participated, the principal said, were two years higher, on the average, than the scores of the non-participants. The first graders in December 1981 were further ahead than any first grade classes of past years at a comparable time in the school year. "We feel this is so because of the writing," the principal noted. The staff also believe that the large differences in the reading of kindergartners is due to their writing experiences.

In addition, Cook said, "writing is one of the hardest disciplines to learn, so the fact that students have learned how to do it must be considered proof of the program's effectiveness."

Current status. All students in the school are writing at least one hour each day. "That has been our goal; we finally reached it," the principal stated. Teachers are stressing writing in almost every class "because we believe this helps children realize the importance of writing." She also believes that writing has helped the school to integrate subjects more completely.

The principal's role. Cook's role has changed from being a teacher of writing and a trainer of other teachers to that of a resource person on writing, an observer of the writing process, and a supporter of the teachers and what they are doing. In practical terms, this means her duties extend from ordering supplies for writing to encouraging teachers who are having problems with particular students. She also spends hours in the classrooms when students are writing. "The teachers like me to be there because it is a great support to them, and the students want to read their writing to me and have me hold a conference with them on their writing."

Cook summarized her role in this way: "I feel it is

important for me to do anything that will make the teaching of writing easier and more organized for the teachers."

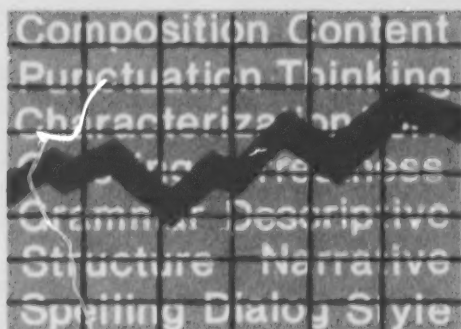
Advice to other principals. "You have to go about starting a writing program very slowly and very carefully. It takes a long time to get a handle on what is going on and also to get teachers to see the need for an intensive effort in improving writing."

"Principals," Cook continued, "must be careful in the way they approach the teachers. They cannot be made to feel it is their fault that students cannot write." Rather, the idea to get across is that "it is not our fault or your fault; none of us was taught to teach writing."

She suggested the use of a low-key, encouraging approach with staff members who are not comfortable with writing.

Some other administrators have said to Cook they would not have the time to do what she has done. But, she observed, "I believe I should be spending time with the teachers and the students. This is my priority as an administrator."

Is it worth it? "Oh, golly, yes," Cook emphasized. "These kids go away with something — a process they can use — something that no one can ever take away from them. I have seen them use the process in other subjects. It's worth it."



Evaluation

Assessing or evaluating student writing is not easy. Rexford Brown of the National Assessment of Educational Progress pointed out some of the problems at a conference on the assessment of writing sponsored by the Clearinghouse for Applied Performance Testing of the Northwest Regional Laboratory, Portland, Oreg.

To begin with, Brown said, "we don't know how children learn the language-skills essential to writing and how these skills develop over time. In addition," he continued, "no clear consensus exists on what should be taught; we don't have a definition of good writing; and we are not sure of the ideal conditions for maximum student performance on writing tasks."

Nevertheless, writing evaluations are being used successfully for *administrative* purposes (e.g., assigning grades, placement in courses), *instructional* purposes (e.g., diagnosing student writing problems), and *evaluation and research* (determining the effectiveness of a writing program, measuring students' growth as writers over a specific period of time).

School districts must determine their purposes in evaluating student writing before choosing the method of evaluation they will use. This caution is repeated in numerous guides to the evaluation of student writing. For example, the California Department of Education says in its *Handbook for Planning Effective Writing Programs*:

"Evaluation is only one aspect of the post-writing stage of the writing process; thus, it should be kept in perspective. Commonly, teachers have 'taught' composition primarily by emphasizing evaluation. Students wrote; teachers corrected. Overemphasis on this one part of the writing process should be avoided, because it can teach students that correctness rather than the communication of meaning is what writing is all about. Evaluation should be simply one step in the overall process.

"It is vital to the development of student writing that evaluation be used to support, not thwart, students in their work. . . . Whatever the reason for evaluation, the purpose should determine the methods of evaluation."

Two Methods Available

Two methods are used to assess or evaluate student writing performance: direct measurement and indirect measurement.

In a direct measurement, students write on a specific topic; thus, the component of writing that is tested is actual composition skill.

In indirect measurement, an objective test generally composed of multiple-choice questions is used to assess students' knowledge of the mechanics of language (e.g., spelling, punctuation, usage, grammar, vocabulary).

The Los Angeles County Schools reviewed the implications of using both methods in *A Common Ground for Assessing Competence in Written Expression* (Division of Curriculum and Instructional Services, Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, 9300 E. Imperial Highway, Downey, Calif. 90242; \$1.50).

Direct measurement favored. The guide, developed by a team of teachers and curriculum specialists, favors direct measurement, using a writing sample, as the most valid measurement of student writing. "When teachers and students know that assessment will be through a writing sample," the booklet notes, "they are likely to focus on the writing process itself, instead of exercises in mechanics and punctuation."

Other advantages mentioned:

- Direct measurement "brings an English department together in considering major aspects of writing," the guide says. For example, the English

department must design a common "prompt" (test question), plan a writing day, collect and code the student papers to assure anonymity, design a rubric (scoring guide), work at scoring the papers to achieve acceptable inter-reader reliability, and then score the papers. The guide suggests that the tasks be coordinated by a districtwide writing committee involving administrators, teachers, and counselors. "Although time consuming," it says, "the benefits for students are considerable."

- Another advantage: When students are asked to produce samples of their writing, parents and the public become aware that writing is being taught and assessed.

The guide notes that individual teachers can use a writing sample to diagnose student needs, to help students perceive and improve their own writing weaknesses, and to involve students in the evaluation process itself. Small groups of teachers, on the other hand, can use a writing sample to diagnose student needs in writing, to improve teaching skills, and to help students understand their own weaknesses.

When assessment is done on a schoolwide basis, the guide says, the results can be useful for planning staff development programs, for articulation between departments and disciplines, for diagnosis of specific writing weaknesses in a school population, and for alerting students to legal requirements (minimum competency or proficiency requirements) for graduation. A districtwide assessment, on the other hand, can be used for measuring student growth in writing through grade levels and for articulation between different grade levels.

The greatest shortcoming to using writing samples, the guide notes, "is the very real problem of inter-reader reliability when the samples are scored." It adds, however, that competent, trained readers can achieve sufficient inter-reader reliability to meet statistically acceptable standards.

Indirect measurement described. Los Angeles County's guide points out that objective tests, an indirect measurement of written expression, can be either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. Both types are published by commercial firms.

The guide says these two types of tests have different purposes. A norm-referenced test uses averages, or norms, to indicate performance level. Thus, by definition, this kind of test requires that 50 percent of the students taking the test at a particular grade level score "below norm." The guide cautions that norm-referenced tests contain few

items that measure short-term gains in writing (e.g., from classroom instruction).

One use for a norm-referenced test is to compare large groups of students to the norms established for the test.

By contrast, criterion-referenced tests of student writing are designed to measure what is being taught. They are sensitive to classroom instruction. Students must answer 70 to 85 percent of the items in the test correctly to indicate mastery of the aspects covered. The catch, however, is that a criterion-referenced test in writing is likely to measure only one or two major aspects of composition unless it consists of a variety of subtests, the guide points out.

The aspects of writing measured in a criterion-referenced test may include: finding a thesis or central idea, style (audience, tone, word choice), organization (topic sentence, relevant and irrelevant detail, main ideas, and supporting statements), sentence manipulation (coordination, subordination), word recognition, usage, and conventions.

In planning a districtwide assessment using an objective test, a district has three options: it may purchase a criterion-referenced test already developed by a publishing company, it may contract with a testing company to develop a test based on district objectives, or it may develop a test of its own.

Whatever option is chosen, the Los Angeles County guide cautions, a district must carefully examine the items in the test and the number of items in particular categories to assure that the important aspects of the writing process are measured. If, for example, the test includes many items dealing with the comma or capitalization, teachers will teach these conventions as if they were at the center of the writing process. "The test," the guide advises, "should deal with such important aspects of written English as finding an appropriate language consistent with a writer's tone, sentence manipulation, coping with syntactical problems, and choosing a plan of organization."

The guide notes that carefully constructed objective tests can indicate degrees of competence in a number of aspects of written expression. For example, students who write well are almost always good spellers and excellent readers; therefore, students who attain high scores on objective tests are likely to be good writers.

The guide concludes that districts would do well to use both direct and indirect measures of student writing to attain the most valid and reliable assessment of student competence in written expression. It suggests that two writing samples and a criterion-

referenced test be used. Further, it advises that the two writing samples be given on separate days and that they measure different kinds of writing, e.g., a letter and an essay. The criterion-referenced test, it suggests, should place emphasis on the important skills of writing, such as sentence mastery and organization, rather than on lesser skills, such as mechanics.

The guide also recommends that teachers keep individual folders of student writing throughout the year as further documentation of an individual student's growth toward mastery. "Such an assessment can assure a better understanding of the writing task by the public and also assure fairness to students."

Scoring

Another important issue for school districts in assessing student writing is to determine the procedure to be followed in scoring writing samples. The most common approaches currently in use include holistic, primary trait, and analytical scoring. These

options differ from one another in the kind of information each provides, in complexity, and in the time and effort required for completion. Nancy J. Bridgeford summarized all three options in *A Directory of Writing Assessment Consultants*:

"Holistic Scoring. Holistic scoring involves reading sample papers for an overall or 'whole' impression. While individual components such as organization, word use, grammar, and style undoubtedly affect a rater's response, none of these factors is rated separately. Because a single score is used, the system is quick and efficient. Raters require about half a day of training to gain familiarity with the system and consistency in scoring. Usually a four-point or an eight-point scoring scale is used. In holistic scoring, 'range finders' provide the guidelines for assigning scores. Range finder papers are model papers that reflect the approximate skills of writers at each scoring level in that particular sample only. Consequently, a paper assigned a score of four will not necessarily be an outstanding paper in its own right; it will, however, be one of the better

Helpful References on Evaluation of Writing

A Comparison of Direct and Indirect Writing Assessment Methods. Clearinghouse for Applied Performance Testing, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 300 S.W. Sixth Ave., Portland, Oreg. 97204.

A Directory of Writing Assessment Consultants (which includes the names of organizations and persons in 48 states and the District of Columbia who can help school districts in designing and administering direct assessments of student writing). Clearinghouse for Applied Performance Testing; see address above.

A Guide to Published Tests of Writing Proficiency (a guide to the characteristics, selection, considerations, and sources of available language usage tests for indirect assessment of writing). Clearinghouse for Applied Performance Testing; see address above.

A Procedure for Writing Assessment and Holistic Scoring. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communications Skills, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

Measuring Growth in English by Paul B. Diederich. National Council of Teachers of English; see address above.

"Individualized Goal Setting, Self-Evaluation, and Peer Evaluation," an article examining three ways students could be involved in examining their own and classmates' writing. *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging.* National Council of Teachers of English; see address above.

"Using the Primary Trait System for Evaluating Writing," a paper by Ina V.S. Mullis. National Assessment of Educational Progress, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln St., Suite 700, Denver, Colo. 80295.

papers from the group being currently scored.

"During training, raters quickly acquire consistency in applying holistic scores. Despite this, all papers should be read by at least two raters to minimize scoring error. Disagreements are generally resolved through a third reading. Holistic scoring is rapid and efficient. Depending on the length of the sample, experienced raters can score 30 to 40 papers an hour.

"Because proficiency criteria in holistic scoring are never precisely defined (range finders are used instead), this scoring method does not yield diagnostic information on a student's writing strengths and weaknesses. It does, however, provide a reliable and consistent method of rank ordering students and comparing overall proficiency levels on a given writing sample.

"Analytical Scoring. In analytical scoring, raters analyze a paper's merit on the basis of several (usually three to five) factors considered important to any piece of writing in any context. The specific factors to be assessed — organization, punctuation, usage, creativity, sense of audience — must be individually scored. Criteria for good, mediocre, and weak papers in each of the categories to be assessed must be explicitly and completely detailed in a scoring guide to be used by all raters. Analytical scoring is more time-consuming than holistic, in both training and actual scoring of papers. Since each trait must be scored separately, scoring time depends on the number of items assessed. Each item takes one to two minutes to rate. Therefore, allowing two readings to maintain reliability, a paper scored on three traits would require six to twelve minutes of scoring time.

"Analytical scoring is often complicated by raters' tendency to allow an impression of one trait to influence the scoring of another trait (e.g., a paper with striking ideas may also be scored high in other areas when, in fact, it merits a high score only on ideas). Despite these potential disadvantages, analytical scoring has one definite advantage: It provides a thorough trait-by-trait analysis of students' writing proficiency in respect to specific criteria.

"Primary Trait Scoring. Primary trait scoring is similar to analytical in approach, except that generally only one trait is scored. Further, while analytical scoring focuses on traits important to any piece of writing in any context, primary trait scoring is situation-specific. In other words, primary trait scoring is based on the premise that any piece of writing is directed toward a particular audience for a particular purpose. The successful writer achieves

the purpose he or she intends. For example, a good letter of application will get a job interview, while a set of instructions for assembling a bicycle will be clear and easy to follow. Whatever trait is most important (i.e., primary) in a given situation, is the trait that will be scored. In a campaign speech that trait might be rhetorical style; in a department store's written response to a customer complaint, the primary trait might be courtesy or persuasiveness.

"In primary trait scoring, criterion levels must be established for a scoring guide, and raters should be familiar with that guide before scoring. Ideally, raters (at least a task force from within the larger group) should participate in defining traits and establishing criterion levels. This helps raters internalize the system and yields a scoring guide that is workable and defensible.

"As with analytical scoring, defining proficiency levels is time consuming work. Experts urge allowing one day of trial and error, discussion, and debate for each trait defined. But primary trait scoring's strength is that it does allow the reporting of student performance on various selected characteristics (e.g., persuasiveness, organization, coherence). As a consequence, the scoring system provides more precise information — albeit more limited information — than does holistic scoring."

Evaluation To Help Students

The New York State Education Department says teachers can help students solve writing problems through two types of diagnoses: a diagnosis of the process students go through while writing and a diagnosis of the papers written (or product).

In the diagnosis of the process, the department suggests that teachers seek answers to these questions:

Pre-writing

1. Does the student analyze the key elements of the task?
2. How much time does the student spend inventing and incubating ideas? Does he or she brainstorm and jot down ideas? Talk the ideas out with peers?
3. How much time does he or she spend planning? Does the student organize or "jump in?"

Writing

1. Does the student draft by the sentence, the paragraph, or the whole piece of writing? In other words, does the student make a practice of going back over each sentence as he or she writes, or each paragraph, or not until the end of the piece? (Or

Analyzing a Student's Writing Product

Student _____ Class _____
 Teacher _____ Date _____

Yes/No	Rhetorical Task	Yes/No	Sentence Structure/ Syntax
_____	1. Does the student understand the directions?	_____	1. Does the student demonstrate an awareness of the options available to vary sentence structure? (To fully answer this question, several samples of the student's writing are required.)
_____	2. Does the student recognize the rhetorical aim, e.g., to report, to request, to persuade?	_____	2. Is the sentence structure free of errors? (e.g., unintentional fragments)
_____	3. Does the student use the conventions of the mode (letter, report)?	_____	3. Are all sentences short and choppy or long and stringy?
_____	4. Does the student have a consistent point of view?	_____	
_____	5. Does the student demonstrate a sense of audience?	_____	
	<i>Relation of Parts to a Unified Whole</i>		<i>Word Choice</i>
_____	1. Does the student demonstrate a general plan of organization or logical sequencing?	_____	1. Does the student use clear, concrete language?
_____	2. Does the student support generalization with appropriate reasons, details, examples?	_____	2. Does the student use words accurately?
_____	3. Does the student include the appropriate level of generalization (abstraction) and exclude irrelevant detail?	_____	3. Does the student use a single, specific word instead of clumsy phrases or clauses?
_____	4. Does the student demonstrate coherence through the use of judicious repetition of key words, control of pronoun reference, as well as maintain logical tense and mood?	_____	4. Does the student demonstrate appropriate level of usage? (formal, informal, slang)
		_____	5. Does the student avoid unnecessary repetition of words and phrases?
		_____	<i>Mechanics</i>
		_____	1. Does the student spell correctly?
		_____	2. Does the student use appropriate punctuation?
		_____	3. Does the student use correct capitalization?
		_____	4. Is the handwriting neat and legible?

Source: *Helping Student Writers*
 The New York State Education Department

does he or she go back over it at all?)

2. Can the student stay with each thought in the line of his or her discussion long enough to develop it?

Post-Writing

1. Does the student edit: add, subtract, change around?

2. Does the student proofread?

The department points out that teacher intervention at various stages of the writing process is more effective than dealing solely with the product. "If there is something wrong with the product," it advises, "change the process."

Note: For the department's suggestions on how to diagnose student papers, see the box in this chapter.

Additional tips: To reduce the paperwork burden for teachers and to help students, the department gives the following additional tips:

1. Use many short assignments instead of a few long assignments. Long writing assignments encourage bad writing on the part of the student, who just concentrates on filling up the space.

2. Have students hand in the rough draft as well as the final copy. This practice helps the teacher to discover how much rewriting went on, and where the student went wrong in writing. Conferences with the student in which the two drafts are compared often help bring about improvement.

3. At times, correct a set of papers for one concept you have taught, rather than for every possible fault.

4. On some occasions, mark a specific type of error through half the paper, then require the student to go through the rest of the paper to find and correct similar errors.

5. Allow students to choose a few of the best pieces from their writing folders to be entered for their composition grades for the quarter or for the semester.

6. Pair students to write one composition between them. On one assignment, one is primarily responsible; on the next assignment, responsibilities are reversed. Both students get the same grade.

7. Groups of students may act as an editorial panel to select the best papers of an assignment to be duplicated for the entire class. Give the panel the privilege of suggesting revisions to the authors, just as real editors do.

8. A brief checklist for the student to use before

he or she hands in the paper encourages self-evaluation and revision.

9. To encourage the idea that papers should be revised *before* being handed in for evaluation, have the students put their final copy on a ditto sheet. Provide a copy of the ditto sheet to each student in the class. The results:

- Students share in evaluation and grading.
- The audience increases from just one (the teacher) to the whole class.
- The difficulty of making corrections on a ditto sheet forces the student to rough draft and revise carefully *before* putting final copy on such a sheet.
- Students see how other students write and think.
- The booklets may be read by parents to gain a understanding about what their child and other children are doing in class.
- English teachers could exchange booklets and compare grades on sample compositions. This method will contribute to greater uniformity in marking procedures within a department.
- Ultimately, students will develop more proficiency in correcting papers themselves.



Case Study: Grosse Pointe, Mich.

Features To Note:

- One person in charge of evaluation/
administration of the writing program.
- Development of evaluation system.
- Compulsory writing workshop in grade 10.

In 1971, the Grosse Pointe (Mich.) Public School System, a district serving a high-income area in which the parents are much concerned about the basics, started to investigate its writing program. It did not like what it found.

The district started to change its approach initially by asking teachers in the primary grades to start teaching creative writing. But the teachers ignored

the request, noted Roger A. McCaig, district director of research and development, in an interview for this report.

A number of changes took place over the next 10 years, including strong administration of the writing program under McCaig's leadership, inservice training for teachers and administrators, and development of an evaluation system that has since been adopted by other school districts.

The changes in the district's writing program have not been easy to attain, nor is the program perfect yet, McCaig said. Writing in all content areas, for example, is recognized as a desirable goal for the district, but it's done only on a "spotty" basis in secondary grades. "I'm not satisfied or proud of our record in this area," McCaig noted. "It's a problem for us, but it is better than it used to be."

The gains in the overall writing program have been attained only after conflict in many cases. McCaig frankly admitted that "it was touch and go in 1975-76 on whether I would be fired or not because, among other things, I advocated that the district not teach formal grammar in the third grade. Not only that," he said, "but I would say things like 'you have to start with meaning, with communicating a message, and you should not teach [mechanical] skills in isolation.'"

McCaig, whose background includes 15 years as an English teacher as well as work in curriculum development, has been able to enforce strong positions on how writing is taught in the district.

The research director's insistence on reform reflects what he learned while teaching writing to junior high school students. They would come to him, he said, with some understanding of grammar but generally with no experience in writing. Now, students in the district "may still come into a new class with some skill deficiencies," McCraig said, "but all of them can write at least two pages of stuff you can understand."

Evaluation Model

Development of the evaluation system and a new curriculum began in 1974. The district collected 50 to 100 samples of impromptu student writing at each grade. Then a committee of teachers read the papers, arriving at a consensus about the relative quality of each paper. The papers were grouped into levels, and the committee defined the characteristics of papers at each level. In this way, committee members identified the critical elements that made some papers better than others.

These critical elements became the basis for judging student writing and for determining what

should be emphasized at each grade level. Subsequently, the district started to assess student writing on an annual basis and to rank papers using the evaluation system.

The district explains why it evaluates writing the way it does in *A Model for the Evaluation of Student Writing: A Handbook for Teachers*:

"The marked improvement in the quality of student writing in the local setting suggests that the characteristics of writing identified in the validation research are indeed the critical variables that really do make a difference in learning to write and in teaching writing. Experience has shown that the criteria in the model serve as general guides for instruction, as a constructive focus for students, and as a part of the total process of improving student learning."

Annual assessment: Grosse Pointe schools assess writing each spring by requiring every student in grades 1-10 to select a topic from a number of choices and to write an impromptu paper with no assistance of any kind. Elementary students are given 30 minutes to write a paper; secondary students have 45 minutes. On another day, the process is repeated with a different set of topics. Students get two chances in an effort to obtain the most accurate measure of their competence at a given time.

The teacher, usually in a conference with individual students, selects the better of the two papers and submits it for judging. The judges look for evidence in the writing of specific competencies, and they rate the papers on a scale ranging from level one to level seven. The evaluation criteria used to determine the ratings or levels of writing in grades 7 and 8 follow:

Evaluation Criteria Grades 7-8

"Level 1 — Not competent. The content is inadequate for the topic, or the writing contains deficiencies which are so serious that they interfere with communication. The writing is seriously deficient in either spelling or in usage and wording. Words are not merely misspelled. The misspellings represent a lack of understanding of the way English syllables and morphemes are spelled and of the way written expression works. The usage problems are so severe that they represent difficulty in organizing words in writing rather than being explained by a difference in dialect or a lack of awareness of the way formal

written English works.

"Level 2 — Not competent. The student can express a message which can be readily understood and which contains adequate content for the topic.

"The writing, however, contains numerous errors, judged by standards appropriate for middle school. When the paper is read aloud, it makes good sense to a listener. When it is read silently, however, the numerous errors become apparent.

"Level 3 — Marginally competent. The student can compose a completed series of ideas about a topic with a minimum of serious deficiencies in spelling, usage, and punctuation, judged by standards appropriate for middle school. The errors are common in middle school writing.

"The writing, however, is not competent in one or more of the basic skills listed below for Level 4.

"Level 4 — Competent. The student can compose a completed series of ideas about a topic with the following skills, judged by standards appropriate for middle school: sentence sense, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, awareness of the principles of paragraphing and organization.

"The writing, however, does not contain all of the characteristics of highly competent writing listed below for Level 5.

"Level 5 — Highly competent. The student can compose a completed series of ideas about a topic with basic skills at a level appropriate for middle school and with the following characteristics of highly competent writing: overall organization, sentence structure, vocabulary, focus in the selection of ideas, observations, and ideas in addition to facts and details.

"The writing, however, does not contain passages of superior thinking or writing.

"Level 6 — Superior. The student can compose a highly competent paper which contains critical thinking or richness and vitality of expression. [A portion of the student's writing attains the 'superior' level.] Though not sustained, [the best passages] indicate that the student has outstanding potential as a writer.

"Level 7 — Superior. The student can compose a paper with a sustained vitality and richness of expression."

In addition to providing a definitive statement about the present ability of each student writer, the levels are referred to by teachers and counselors in diagnosing writing problems and in providing guid-

"Any school district that has worked on writing — my way or any other way — gets improvement."

—Roger A. McCaig
Director of Research and Evaluation
Grosse Pointe Public School System

ance on courses and appropriate instruction in writing. The levels also indicate to parents the writing competence of their children.

Cost of the assessment: Running the assessment is considered part of McCaig's job, so the cost is not as high as it could be if a district had to hire a specialist to manage it.

Each paper is read by two different trained judges; if they assign different scores to a paper, a third judge reads it. The judges, usually former English teachers, are paid 25 cents per paper. The majority of papers are given the same score by the first two readers, so the cost per paper is 50 cents.

There is a "fair amount" of clerical work in sorting and handling the papers, McCaig noted, and some time and cost involved in training the judges. Therefore, he concluded, the total cost to assess the writing of each student is probably \$1 to \$1.25. He budgets approximately \$3,500 per year to pay the judges for their work.

Teachers sometimes want to help with the evaluation, and they do so on released time. The district pays substitute teachers to take their place in the classroom, so the cost is approximately the same as if outsiders were hired to perform the evaluation.

Spin-offs: As teachers learn more about the value of the assessment, they begin to conduct their own classroom assessments in order to determine where they need to spend more time, McCaig said. And, he noted, they are much more inclined to ask their colleagues for help. He offered this example: "A third grade teacher may say, 'I still had 15 students at the end of the year who did not know how to write a sentence. Can somebody give me some ideas on what to do?'"

Help for Teachers and Principals

McCaig personally conducts training sessions for groups of teachers. Principals also are required to

'We've Learned A Few Things About Students and Writing'

The use of the evaluation system developed by the Grosse Pointe (Mich.) Public School System has led to many discoveries about writing, young people, and learning itself, according to district officials.

The discoveries, listed in a district handbook on the evaluation system, include:

- First and second graders can learn to compose ideas in writing. By the end of the second grade, with the right program, virtually all second graders can learn to compose a completed series of ideas about a topic, expressing ideas in nonbasic sentence patterns.
- Students who enter the third grade able to compose understandable stories without concern for spelling and punctuation become better third grade writers than students who have to learn to express ideas in writing and to learn skills at the same time.
- Virtually all students who learn to become highly competent writers in grades 3-10 are competent readers and have at least average mental ability.
- Many high ability students who are underachievers in writing ability can be taught to improve their abilities in intensive, short-term instructional programs.
- If the right time for learning to write is not seized in a child's development history, the omission may be irreparable.
- Each grade level plays an important role in contributing to the growth of writing abilities. No grade level can do the entire job or make up for experiences that should have occurred in earlier grades.
- Scores on standardized tests of usage and mechanics do not measure or predict performance in actual writing.
- Most writing skills cannot be learned successfully by elementary students from board work, workbooks, or group explanations. Students can learn skills when they are shown how to transform the writing they have already composed.

attend because "they need to know what their teachers are learning," the research director said. In a training session, McCaig might review a group of papers in which few students are using "good words" or "good sentences" or they are neglecting to put interpretation or ideas into their writing. McCaig reviews strategies to help students overcome these weaknesses. "By being in the sessions, principals know what to look for when they go into the classroom to evaluate the writing program," he said.

Principals receive training in evaluation techniques, but any principals who want help in evaluating writing in their schools may call upon McCaig to do an evaluation.

The district requires teachers to keep a folder of the writing of each student in each class. Principals review the writing in the folders as part of their evaluation of the writing program.

The district's close monitoring of the writing program is resented by some teachers, McCaig said. But, otherwise, he added, "there would be some teachers who would not teach writing. They say they will in department meetings or in after-school meetings, but when you look in the student folders, there won't be any writing."

Information from assessment of student writing is not used in formal evaluations of teachers, but it is used to help set goals for teachers in the year following the collection of data. Teachers also are asked to use the evaluation data to set goals for themselves.

In addition to providing inservice training to teachers, the district helps teachers solve problems in teaching writing by bringing together personnel from different buildings for idea-swapping and problem-solving sessions.

Secondary Requirements

Grosse Pointe requires all students in grade 9 to take "Introduction to High School English." In grade 10, all students must take a one-semester writing workshop, and they choose an elective course such as "Twentieth Century Literature" to finish out the year. Writing about literature is forbidden in the writing workshop; instead, students concentrate on argumentation or journalism or term papers, or other types of writing. The number of students in writing workshops is limited to 18-20, compared to 23-24 in other classes.

In grades 11 and 12, students have a choice of electives in English/language arts.

Prognosis

In summarizing the district's progress in imple-

menting a writing program, McCaig said, "there are no holdouts among the elementary faculty for the district approach to writing. They are a pretty good advertisement for our program now." The only holdouts, he noted, are at the high school level. Some English teachers, he said, believe the only topic that should be written about is literature. In addition, he noted, some teachers outside the English department resist the idea of requiring writing. But, the research director added, the district will continue to stress writing across the curriculum.

Note: Grosse Pointe's handbook, *A Model for the Evaluation of Student Writing: A Handbook for Teachers*, is available from the district, 389 St. Clair Ave., Grosse Pointe, Mich., 48230; \$5.

Other AASA Critical Issues Reports

School Budgeting: Problems and Solutions. School districts should receive their fair share of the tax dollar if they develop reasonable, understandable, and defensible budgets. How to do this is explained in detail. The report describes seven steps that can help make the budget an integral part of the school program; descriptions of budgeting methods; how to involve staff, community, and students; steps in planning ahead; and primers on school finance campaigns, public relations, working with the media, answering school critics, negotiations, and lobbying. 72pp; 1982; single copy, \$10.95; Stock No. 021-00900.

Declining Enrollment — Closing Schools: Problems and Solutions. This report details the lessons learned about declining enrollment in the last decade, among them: school administrators must be "managers of change"; the importance of planning; the effective use of staff and citizen committees in making change; and the need to tune up board policies in 25 areas. Also included is advice on public relations, projecting enrollment, empty school space, and staff reductions. Of particular interest to districts in planning for the future are three chapters on: financial survival, school curriculum, and declining enrollment at the high school level. One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1981 roundup of education books. (80pp; 1981; single copy, \$10.95; Stock No. 021-00336)

Collective Bargaining: Problems and Solutions. Most of the nation's school administrators have a relatively new chore called collective bargaining — and many of them think it has a negative effect on their schools. This report can help administrators and school boards improve their understanding of the negotiating process. Included is advice from negotiations experts on: what to include and what to leave out of negotiated contracts, contract language, table strategies, impasse, contract administration, grievances and arbitration, communications, salaries, fringe benefits, reduction in force clauses. One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1981 roundup of education books. (95pp; 1981; single copy, \$10.95; Stock No. 021-00330)

Student Discipline: Problems and Solutions. A large variety of measures now exist for preventing unacceptable student behavior. This report defines: how school boards set the course for discipline; the student handbook as an indispensable instrument for the management of student conduct; how to tap student resources; ways to involve parents; what teachers can do; and advice on curriculum improvement, reducing vandalism, smoking, corporal punishment, and suspension and expulsion. One of the 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1980 roundup of education books. (80pp; 1980; single copy, \$9.95; Stock No. 021-00334)

How Schools Can Save \$\$: Problems and Solutions. The problem confronting schools is stark: expenses are going up at a rapid rate and income is not going up fast enough to meet the added cost. Consequently, balancing the school budget is one of

the toughest jobs confronting schools. This report includes suggestions from experts and case studies on cutting the costs of the most expensive items in any district's budget, e.g., staffing costs, fringe benefits, and energy and insurance costs. (80pp; 1980; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00333)

Teacher Competency: Problems and Solutions. The testing of teachers is already under way in several states and school districts. This report tells what researchers know about "good" teachers and what administrators can do to improve teachers. Special features give tips on how to reward teachers for good teaching and how to eliminate time-wasters that reduce teacher effectiveness. One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1980 roundup of education books. (80pp; 1980; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00332)

Keeping Students in School: Problems and Solutions. Student truancy is getting worse, according to administrators who run the nation's schools. This report provides an in-depth look at truancy, as well as other aspects of student attendance. It examines why students stay away from school, why they drop out, attendance patterns in the future, and coping with attendance problems through tougher policies and programs. (79pp; 1979; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00331)

Staff Dismissal: Problems and Solutions. Who says teachers and other school employees can't be fired? They can. School districts can dismiss staff members in cases of incompetence or when declining enrollment or budget problems demand cuts. This report examines these questions: What can be done about incompetence? What are the steps in building a dismissal case? What about teacher tenure, alternatives to RIFing, and due process requirements? One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in 1978. (80pp; 1978; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00512)

The Competency Movement: Problems and Solutions. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons underlying the minimum competency movement. It also includes: considerations in adopting a student competency policy, what kinds of tests can be used, pros and cons of issuing a diploma or certificate and available alternatives, how various districts and states are implementing competency requirements. A national clearinghouse called this report "perhaps the best single source of information on competency testing." (92pp; 1978; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00510)

School Energy Crisis: Problems and Solutions. Schools don't have to sit immobilized while they're clobbered by higher energy costs. This report provides answers to school energy problems in these areas, among others: energy audits, how to hire energy consultants, construction, transportation. One of 11 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1977 roundup of education books. (88pp; 1977; single copy, \$8.95; Stock No. 021-00380)

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